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SHELLEY AND HIS WRITINGS.

BY

CHARLES S. MIDDLETON.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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J. Billing, Printer, 103, Hatton Garden, London, and Guildford, Surrey.

ERRATA.

VOL. I.

Page 106, line 5, *read* "the first poem in the collection was *not* Shelley's own."

Page 125, line 14 *omit* the word "misprision."

Page 132, line 12, *for* "Epiphychid on," *read* "Epipsychidion."

Page 165, line 10, *for* "Rosseau," *read* "Rousseau."

Page 198, line 17, *for* "the laureats tell us," *read* "the Laureate tells us."

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PREFACE.

FIVE years ago, I conceived the idea of writing the Life of Shelley. It would be incorrect to say that I have been engaged upon it ever since; but from that period I have devoted the best energies of my mind to the accomplishment of this object.

I have sought diligently for materials, and have lived as it were in almost perpetual communion with the Poet whose character I have endeavoured faithfully to represent, and to whose genius I have desired to pay the tribute of my admiration.

Hitherto a Life of the Poet can scarcely be said to have existed. The volumes by Captain Medwin are so incomplete, that they appear to me by no means to supply the place of one;

and, in love with the subject myself, I am willing to believe that the admirers of Shelley are sufficiently numerous to justify the publication of a more perfect record of his career.

Materials were not wanting for a complete biography; scattered over a large variety of publications, I have found allusions or anecdotes, and sometimes notices that served to illustrate entire epochs of the Poet's life. In this respect I am greatly indebted to an interesting account given by an old Etonian in the pages of the "Athenæum," for the particulars of his life at Eton; and the papers by Mr. Hogg, published many years back, in the "New Monthly Magazine," have been invaluable to me in drawing his career at Oxford.

Besides these innumerable references, the Poet's own correspondence, and Mrs. Shelley's valuable notes to his works, naturally contribute to the elucidation of his history and character.

Nor have I wanted for original materials. During my researches for information I visited Great Marlow, and had the good fortune to meet with Mr. Maddocks, a gentleman who knew the Poet intimately during his residence there. To him I am indebted for many interesting particulars relating to that period; but, besides his own personal reminiscences, he possessed some papers in Shelley's handwriting, of which I have fully availed myself.

Most conspicuous among these, however, is the fragment of an Essay on Prophecy, in which an entirely new light is thrown upon the Poet's theological sentiments at the time it was written.

Not less interesting are the revisions of "Queen Mab," given from a copy of that poem, found also at Marlow. Captain Medwin, who was aware of the existence of the volume revised and corrected by Shelley himself, appears to have been but imperfectly

acquainted with it. I have been enabled to supply a deficiency in this respect, and the specimens given will convey a favourable idea of the value of the whole.

The imaginary attempt at assassination in Caernarvonshire, is an interesting episode in the Poet's life. Original letters in the possession of his son, Sir Percy Shelley, contain the full particulars of this singular affair; no doubt remains, therefore, as to the details, as I have given them.

I must also thank Dr. Madden for the kind services which enabled me to complete the narrative of the Poet's life in Wales, and in Dublin.

Such are the materials I have endeavoured to construct into one consistent narrative, and I am convinced that no available authority exists that I have not exhausted.

London, Jan., 12, 1858.

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FAC SIMILE OF SHELLEY'S HAND WRITING.

Therefore the
voice of Christ like that which Moses heard
may be called the voice of God. Or thus
it may be said that the Wisdom of God, that
is superhuman wisdom, assumed human nature
in Christ. And that Christ was the Way of
Salvation.

But I must warn the reader, that I recommend
the consideration of certain doctrines established by
some Churches concerning Christ, which I only
wish to comprehend, I neither affirm, nor deny
That which I have affirmed, I infer from
Scripture. For it is nowhere stated that

† Moses heir

God appeared to Christ, or spoke to Christ but only that God revealed himself through Christ to the Apostles, & that he was the way of salvation; & lastly that the old law was immediately delivered through an Angel, & not by God himself. Therefore, if Moses spoke with God face to face as one man was his friend (that is through the intermediation of two bodies) Christ communicated with God mind to mind. —

We may assume therefore, that with the exception of Christ, none ever apprehended the revelations of God without the assistance of the imagination that is of words or forms conveyed forth in the organs & that therefore, as shall be shewn more clearly in the following chapter, the 3d qualification to prophecy is rather a more vivid imagination than a more discerning understanding than other men.

Percy B. Shelley

SHELLEY AND HIS WRITINGS.

CHAPTER I.

Birth of Shelley—Antiquity of his family—Opulence of his father—Prospects at birth—Originality of character—His failings—His desire to do good—Vanity incident to youth—Pugnacity—Vicissitudes of his life—Character of his father—Of his mother—His sisters—Early education—Arrives at Brentford.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, only son of Sir Timothy Shelley, of Castle Goring, Baronet, was born at Field Place, Horsham, in the county of Sussex, on the fourth of August, 1792. Sir Thomas, the founder of the family, fought and fell in the cause of Richard the Second; but

from that period, down to the present centu
no individual had raised the name of Shelley t
historical eminence, notwithstanding a close co
nection with the noble blood of the Sydneys
wealth, however, had made amends, as well as
could, for the absence of fame, since at the close of the eighteenth century, Sir Timothy was reckoned among the most opulent heirs in the kingdom.

These circumstances might have appeared to promise Percy, at his birth, a career of ease and splendour, since there was no position in English society, which, with diligence, conduct, and enterprize, he might not have reached. He despised, however, the ordinary ambition of the world, and struck out a path for himself, rough and strewn thickly with thorns, but with extraordinary glory at the goal. He trod it manfully, often sinned against and sinning; he bore up with firmness against persecution, which in many instances he provoked; by his friends he was singularly beloved; by his enemies he was hated with unappeasable rancour; he speculated, he invented, he wrote, dazzling the world equally by the brilliance of his genius, and the wildness of his

opinions, which he loved to exhibit, in the most formidable and startling shapes, in order to astonish and irritate those who, from the malevolence of their dispositions, would have assailed him, had he displayed the persuasive gentleness of Keats, or the sparkling conviviality of Shakespeare.

It is not my intention in this work to become an assailant or an apologist, but a faithful biographer. There are those who believe that Shelley's faults and failings outweighed his good qualities; but there are others who are as profoundly convinced that, with all his errors and irregularities, he possessed a humane and generous heart; that when he appeared to be most open to censure, he was either carried away by the violence of his passions, or by the influence of a delusive theory; and that he endeavoured steadily, according to the best of his ability, to promote the general happiness of mankind.

That he was sometimes mistaken and betrayed into wrong courses, cannot be denied; but had it not appeared to me, that the purpose of his life was good, and that his general behaviour was in harmony with his principles, I would not

have been at the pains to study as I have the events which characterized the few and evil days which were allotted to him.

Had he attained the age of Shakespeare or Milton, I think it is reasonable to infer, from the tenor of his writings, and the circumstances which characterized his later years, that everything in his early life, calculated to give offence, would have been completely obliterated by the energy of his virtue, and the imaginative beauty of his philosophy. We must take him, however, as he was; and even so, whoever accompanies me with candour and impartiality to the end of this narrative will, I think, adopt the conclusion, that though wilful and wayward in his opinions, and at times reprehensible in his conduct, he was upon the whole benevolent and unselfish, and beyond most persons, desirous of promoting the public good, though he often mistook the means by which that great end was to be attained.

In the earlier part of his career, the vanity incident to youth often led him to confound convictions with prejudices, and to take a mischievous delight in running counter to the received opinions of the world. Because dog-

matism is overbearing and offensive, his gallant spirit led him to combat it; but at the same time he omitted to draw the necessary distinction between dogmatic truth and dogmatic falsehood, and therefore gave no more quarter to the one than to the other. Deriving pleasure from shocking people, and exciting their astonishment, he gradually acquired the habit, or rather, I should say, the vice of pugnacity, and was always ready to contend with anybody or anything. This gave him the spirit and air of a martyr, and in other days, in all probability, would have brought him to terminate his life at the stake; nor would he have shrunk even from that, for his courage was as unbounded as his love of contest.

His character therefore, considered apart from actual power, must be acknowledged to have been no ordinary one; and as he possessed from the beginning the prestige of a great fortune, high connections, and distinguished abilities, with the determination to pursue an original course, his life could hardly fail to possess extraordinary interest. It is, in fact, more like romance than history. Voluntary sometimes, and sometimes by accident, he entangled himself, or became entangled in

strange and exciting adventures, in difficulties and dangers, passing rapidly from opulence to poverty, from poverty again to opulence; losing the affections of some friends; creating others as if by magic; wasting vast sums of money; flying precipitately from place to place, in search of health or happiness, which, alas! it seemed destined he should never enjoy, and dying at length on a strange shore amidst tempests, thunder, and infuriated waves.

Such was his career, such his end; the moral of both will be evolved as we proceed with the narrative. The effect upon the reader's mind will depend much upon his own idiosyncrasies; upon the character of his poetical taste; upon the measure of his critical powers. For myself, I admire Shelley's writings, and love the man in spite of all that may be objected to him; yet I do not love him for his faults, but for the many virtues by which, in my opinion, he redeemed them.

Whether the judgment of others will prove equally favourable it is impossible I should know, but I will place before them fairly all the events and circumstances connected with Shelley's life, and leave them to decide for themselves.

Shelley's misfortunes commenced with his birth, since his parents were no way calculated to strengthen the virtues, or remove the defects that lurked in his constitution, mental and physical. Had Sir Timothy been an ordinary person, it might have been well; but he was distinguished from the majority by the hardness of his heart, and the vindictiveness of his disposition. His ruling passion appears to have been the love of money—the most odious, perhaps, of all the vices which degrade humanity.

He nestled snugly among rich country gentlemen in Parliament, where he made no figure; he associated with such members of the territorial aristocracy as chance threw in his way, and he married a wife exactly suited to him. The Baronet and his lady led the ordinary life of such individuals. They ate, they drank, they dressed, they flaunted in fashionable circles; but when they died, would have passed into oblivion as completely as any Saxon Thane and his wife who ate and drank during the Heptarchy, had it not been for the genius of their son, whose childhood they neglected, and whose after-years they conspired to render unhappy by their cruelty.

It is unnecessary, and would be altogether useless, to enlarge upon their proceedings. It was, however, an incalculable misfortune to Shelley, that he was not, like most other distinguished men, watched over by a mother of tender heart and superior understanding.

In emerging into being, he was literally, as Lucretius expresses it, "shipwrecked on the world," forlorn and desolate—for he who is deprived of a mother's love, can find no substitute for it in wealth or friends, or in anything that society can supply. It is to the awakening soul the one thing needful. He who possesses it, is opulent in a garret, while he who wants it is poor upon a throne.

During the first eight or ten years of his life he remained at Horsham, in the society of his parents and sisters, who were older than himself. Here he acquired the first rudiments of knowledge, under the kindly teaching of the pastor of the parish, and amused himself, as other children do, in wandering about the beautiful grounds of his father's mansion, and doing mischief.

His sisters, who appear to have been very fond of him, probably assisted his studies, and made

up, as well as they could, for the want of maternal affection. It is to be regretted that so little is known of them; as they were kind to their brother, it is probable they grew up to be estimable women; though it does not appear that even when the choice rested with him, Shelley ever sought their society. At the age of ten he was removed from the companionship of his sisters, from the benevolent charge of the Christian divine of Horsham, the Reverend Mr. Edwards, and was sent to extend his knowledge at the boarding school of Sion House, near Brentford.

CHAPTER II.

The Brentford schoolmaster — Shelley's treatment at school—His personal appearance—Introduction to his schoolfellows—Spleen of the schoolmaster—Shelley's inattention—Medwin's anecdote—Harshness of Shelley's schoolmaster—Shelley's dreamy abstraction—Walks in his sleep—Removed from Brentford.

Boys who have been brought up from their infancy exclusively in the society of girls, generally find the transition from home to a large school extremely painful. Plato observes, with great justice, that "there is no wild beast like a boy" —that is, I suppose, when all his vices have been properly developed by school training. Shelley very soon had an opportunity of speaking to the truth of this at Brentford; for his new associates at Sion House no sooner beheld his

girlish face, enveloped with soft brown curls, and looking fair and delicate from over-seclusion, than they determined to give him a rough reception into what the advertisements denominate "Scholastic Life."

The proprietor of this academy was a Mr. Mackintosh, a Scotch Doctor of Law, and a divine; he was in a green old age, and could boast of a very red face, and a very bad temper, which was regulated by the daily occurrences of his domestic life, spoken of as not the most harmonious, and of which his face was the barometer, his hand the index.

He was not wanting in many of the qualifications for the instruction of youth, and might, perhaps, be spoken of as a classical scholar, though I shall presently have to relate an anecdote, which will show that he was not remarkably erudite. If the inmates of his academy were a collection of young ogres, he appears to have been as great an ogre as any of them. He looked upon Shelley, with his shrinking figure, and wild eyes, as a sort of fish that had turned up accidentally out of the Thames, and not to be disciplined into humanity by the usual method.

He had no idea of spoiling children, and no one could accuse him of being economical in birch, and his pupils imbibed as much learning as could possibly be whipped into them. But the declension of nouns, and the conjugation of verbs, are not the only things to learn for which boys are sent to school. They there acquire the first knowledge of life, and, above all things, are initiated in the great truth, that in this world, he who will not bravely fight his own way, among selfish competitors and rivals, must make up his mind to go to the wall.

Boys have no compassion, and but little generosity. To take rank amongst them you must surpass them in fighting, in dealing round kicks, bruises, and black eyes, and, generally, in every demonstration of physical strength. This is what they admire, this is what they succumb to, and, therefore, as Shelley's organisation was frail and delicate, and strongly disinclined him to engage in the rough sports and pastimes of the school, he was from the beginning, despised, and buffeted about.

In this the boys of Brentford were the exact representatives of the world; but it must not be

supposed that they were worse than other boys, or that Shelley had more to endure among them than any other youth of nervous temperament and unrobust frame.

The description of him at this period by Medwin—who was his schoolfellow—differs but slightly from that so frequently given of him in after-years. He was tall for his age, slightly and delicately built, with a face expressive of exceeding sweetness and innocence, large blue eyes, fair and ruddy complexion, smooth and ample forehead, finely surmounted by a profusion of silky brown hair, which curled naturally. His features were not regularly handsome, and his face was rather long than oval. His eyes, which were prominently set, and considered by phrenologists favourable for the study of languages, often appeared dull when in repose and dreamy contemplation, but flashed with fire and intelligence when anything excited him. His voice, usually soft and low, became harsh and dissonant in the heat of discussion, for which he very early became distinguished.

There was one defect which he exhibited, in the contraction of his chest, which was probably

the occasion of the many physical sufferings to which he was a martyr all his life—this defect was aggravated by a slight stoop in the shoulders, occasioned by near-sightedness. Such was Shelley at Brentford.

On his first introduction to his new associates they surrounded him, as usual on such occasions, with vulgar curiosity, perplexing him with rude questions, "How old was he?" "Where did he come from?" "Who and what was his father?"

They themselves, it is said, were mostly the sons of London shopkeepers, and, when they discovered his high connections, many of them despised him because he was not one of them. But neither shopkeepers nor the sons of shopkeepers are necessarily vulgar. Pope, Gray, Keats, Gay, Moore, and many other illustrious names, belonged to this class; innumerable examples of genius emerge from the haunts of business. The boys we are speaking of happened to be vulgar by nature, and would have been just the same had they been the sons of earls.

Boys, as well as grown-up men, of common minds, mostly follow the example of those whom

they are in the habit of looking up to as superiors and here they were absorbing into their existence the daily lesson of coarse vulgarity and unsympathising brute qualities, inculcated by their sage preceptor. They smiled obsequiously at the obscene jests in which he not unfrequently indulged, and from which Shelley shrank with ill-concealed disgust, rendering himself thereby the peculiar object of his malicious humour; and when our poet was selected to receive the weight of his malevolence, they enjoyed the sport.

Shelley, however, was not the only one upon whom he vented his spleen. He had too much relish for it to be satisfied with one victim, and the boys well knew, from the peculiar interest they took in the study of his countenance, when to expect an extra share of his malignity.

This was not the temple where children sat at the feet of Wisdom, pursuing their task as a labour of love; nor was the genius that presided over it that of an Epicurus or a Plato, winning the affectionate admiration of those who listened to his eloquent teaching; but rather was it the vengeance of a Dionysius, who unable longer to trample on the hearts of men, entered upon this

calling that he might exercise a tyrannical sway over children. Therefore it is not to be expected that learning should flourish in so noxious an atmosphere.

Coercion, it may be argued, is sometimes needful with unruly boys; but all must agree that the immoderate and intemperate use of it is greatly to be deprecated; it lowers the tone of the mind, is more likely to render it sullen than plastic, and destroys self-respect, and what they did not attain by their own native energy, was never instilled into them by examples of kindness, or by exciting the nobler qualities of the mind. The poet, accordingly, was not very studious at Sion House, caring very little for Latin, less for Greek; and it may be that this seeming inattention was occasionally the cause of his getting into trouble; but the following anecdote will prove that this was not always the case.

A few days after this pedagogue had been indulging in one of his favourite jests, Shelley had a theme set him for two Latin lines, on the subject of Tempestas.

"He came to me," says Medwin, "to assist

him in the task. I had a cribbing book, of which I made great use—'Ovid's Tristibus.' I knew that the only work of Ovid with which the Doctor was acquainted, was the Metamorphoses, and by what I thought good luck, I happened to stumble on two lines exactly applicable to the purpose.

"The hexameter I forget, but the pentameter ran thus:—

'Jam, jam, tacturos sidera celsa pŭtes.'

"When Shelley's turn came to carry up his exercise, my eyes were turned on the divine. There was a peculiar expression on his features, which, like the lightning before the storm, portended what was coming. The spectacles generally lifted above his dark and bushy brows, were lowered to their proper position, and their lenses had no sooner caught the said pentameter, than he read with a loud voice the stolen lines, laying sarcastic emphasis on every word, and suiting the action to the word by boxes on each side of Shelley's ears. Then came the comment.

"'Jam, jam—pooh, pooh, boy! raspberry jam. Do you think you are at your mother's?'

"Then a burst of laughter echoed through the listening benches.

"'Don't you know I have a sovereign contempt for those two monosyllables with which school-boys cram their verses. Hav'n't I told you so a hundred times already? 'Tacturos sidera celsa putes.' What! do the waves on the Sussex coast strike the stars, eh? Celsa siderá. Who does not know that the stars are high? Where did you find that epithet? In your Gradus ad Parnassum, I suppose. You will never mount so high—(another box on the ear, which nearly felled him to the ground.) Putes! you may think that very fine, but to me it is all balderdash;' (another cuff,) after which he tore the verses, and said in a fury:

"'There go now, sir, and see if you can write something better.'"

One more instance of this man's fitness for teaching children, and we have done with him:

Shelley's desk faced the window of the school-room, and he was in the habit of sitting abstractedly watching the clouds, or the flight of the swallows that twittered as they swept by the window, indulging most probably in all kinds of

poetic reverie, meanwhile quite unconsciously he would make quaint sketches of trees that grew on the lawn of Goring Castle, or any other object that hit his fancy on the moment, a habit he retained through life.

On these occasions the pedagogue would delight in coming stealthily behind him, and startling him from his reverie with a sound box on the ears, of course to the infinite delight of the young hopefuls around him. Alas, how often does it happen that the child who demands peculiar care, falls into hands so little capable of fulfilling their task.

Shelley's native aptitude however, and retentive memory, assisted him in his studies, and he soon outstripped his less gifted companions; a word once turned up in a dictionary was never forgotten; but the true education of genius proceeded silently and slowly.

The growth of fancy, and the expansion of thought, often exhibited themselves in his manners and habits; not caring much for the sports and pastimes of boys, he might be seen in the intervals of school-hours in a favourite spot of the play-ground, pacing to and fro, with his

characteristic stride, mostly alone. Something similar is recorded of Byron, who would sit for hours on a certain tombstone in Harrow churchyard, in silent meditation.

He fed his fancy on tales of marvel and mystery, nor did Milton or Collins in their boyhood delight more in visions of oriental dreamland, or the rude grandeur of Gothic romance.

He loved to dream of genii and giants, of bandits and enchanted castles, of spirits and monsters; and every book that came to hand offering food for this mental craving, was eagerly devoured; all those brought to school, after the holidays were soon disposed of; and a small circulating library in the neighbourhood was exhausted, in search of fresh materials, till at length, so far had he wandered in this world of shadows, that he scarcely acknowledged any other existence. By day he roamed about in a state of dreamy abstraction; and at night his slumbers were disturbed with frightful apparitions.

Medwin and he did not sleep in the same room; but one bright moonlight night, he was alarmed by the unearthly apparition of Shelley

entering his room in a state of somnambulism. His eyes were open, and he advanced with slow steps towards the window, which was thrown up, it being the height of summer.

Medwin sprung out of bed, seized him by the arm, and waked him, ignorant of the danger of thus awakening the somnambulist. He was excessively agitated, and after being led back to his couch Medwin sat by him for some time, a witness to the severe erethism of his nerves, which the sudden shock had produced.

This is the only instance of sleep-walking at Sion House, and we are told that even this involuntary transgression brought down upon him a brutal and most unjust punishment. His very dreams seem to have exhibited a remarkable feature. He would first relapse into a state of lethargy and abstraction, and when the access was over, would arouse himself to a supernatural energy. His eyes flashed, his lips quivered, his voice was tremulous with emotion, a sort of ecstasy would come over him, and he talked more like an angelic spirit than a human being.*

* Medwin's Life of Shelley, vol. i. page 34.

Shelley appears to have made no friends at Sion House, if we except his Cousin Medwin, to whom, we are told, he used often to pour out his sorrows with observations far beyond his years, "which," says Medwin, "according to his after-ideas, seemed to have sprung from an antenatal state." At length, however, the young dreamer was removed from the uncongenial atmosphere of Sion House, a place for which he ever afterwards entertained so much disgust, that he would never allow himself to allude to it.

CHAPTER III.

Shelley arrives at Eton—His solitary habits—Is known as Mad Shelley—The Fagging System—Ill treatment of the poet—His conscious superiority—His boyish hilarity—Eton dramatics.

In 1807, when Shelley was in his fifteenth year, we find him at Eton. Here he appears to have been placed under Mr. Hexter, who professed to be a teacher of writing, though it is said that the boys under his roof made a much greater proficiency with their knives and forks than they did with their pens in the writing academy. We are told that he was one of those extra masters, some of whom resided at the College, and holding an amphibious rank between the tutor and the dame, were allowed to take boarders.

The life Shelley led here was very much a repetition of his life at Brentford. An old Etonian says, "for years and years, and long before I knew that Shelley the boy was Shelley the poet and friend of Byron, he dwelt in my memory as one of those strange and unearthly compounds, which sometimes, though rarely, appear in the human form divine."

The same writer adds, "either from natural delicacy of frame, or from possessing a mind which in boyhood busied itself in grasping thoughts beyond his age, probably from something of both, he shunned or despised the customary games and exercises of youth. This made him with other boys a byword and a jest. He was known as Mad Shelley, and many a cruel torture was practised upon him for his moody and singular exclusiveness."

He now became a victim of the fagging system, that very amiable and enlightened custom which so preeminently distinguishes the schools of our aristocracy. It was not surprising that his proud and sensitive spirit should rebel against this abominable practice; and refusing to fag at Eton, Mrs. Shelley tells us, he was treated

with revolting cruelty by masters and boys. This statement, however, I am inclined to think rather too highly coloured, for his early resistance to this species of oppression does not appear to have been the entire cause of the treatment he received at Eton.

The child of genius rarely finds much sympathy among his schoolmates; and in the case of Shelley, they took every opportunity to annoy and insult him. Singly, however, they dared not attack him, "for," says the writer above quoted, "there was a method in his madness which taught repentance; but the herd unite against the stricken, and boys, like men, envy the strongest, and trample upon the weak."

We are told that poor Shelley's anguish and excitement sometimes bordered upon the sublime. Conscious of his own superiority, of being the reverse of what the many deemed him; stung by the injustice of imputed madness—by the cruelty, if he were mad, of taunting the afflicted—his rage became boundless. Like Tasso's gaoler, his heartless tyrants all but raised up the demon which they said was in him; and adds the same writer, "I have seen him sur-

rounded, hooted, baited like a maddened bull; and at this distance of time (forty years after) I seem to hear ringing in my ears the cry which Shelley was wont to utter in his paroxysms of revengeful anger."

Boys exhibit a considerable amount of ingenuity in inventing different means of torture. In the dark winter evenings, we are told, it was the practice to assemble under the cloisters previous to mounting to the upper school. Sometimes a wicked wag would introduce a football into the forbidden ground, and the cloistered square would echo with shouts of laughter, as some hapless dandy of the day was nailed, or in other words, received a blow from the muddy, bounding ball.

Poor Shelley, though anything but a fop, was often marked out for this trial of temper. But there was another practice common then, which, though usually less practical, was infinitely more galling. The particular name of some particular boy would be sounded by one, taken up by another, and another, until hundreds echoed and re-echoed the name. At the same time, if the selected were a big boy, a path was usually

made, and a space opened for the one on whom a hundred tongues were calling.

Shelley, in his Eton days, was a big boy, and was, likewise, often selected for this species of torture. "This Shelley, Shelley, Shelley," says our authority, "which was thundered in the cloisters, was but too often accompanied by practical jokes—such as knocking his books from under his arm, seizing them as he stooped to recover them, pulling and tearing his clothes, or pointing with the finger, as one Neapolitan maddens another. The result was, as stated, a paroxysm of anger, which made his eyes flash like a tiger's; his cheeks grow pale as death; his limbs quiver, and his hair stand on end."

That he should have little reverence for his teachers, who abetted and encouraged this species of tyranny, either openly and avowedly, or by disregarding his complaints against it, will be readily understood; nor can it be expected that he should learn much from those for whom he could feel no esteem; accordingly he owed little or nothing to them, except the sharpening of his faculties to a keener sense of injustice and oppression.

They who were kind to Shelley never had occasion to regret it; and there was one whose memory he always clung to in after-life, who often stood by to befriend and support him at Eton. He is said to be the prototype of the old man who liberates Laon from his prison tower, in the "Revolt of Islam," as well as of Zonoras, in "Prince Athanase," which puts him before us in a most amiable light:

"Prince Athanase had one beloved friend—
An old, old man, with hair of silver white,
And lips where heavenly smiles would hang and blend
With his wise words."

It must not be supposed that Shelley's days were altogether without sunshine at Eton College. His delicate organization frequently subjected him to fits of melancholy; but the elasticity of youth easily overcomes petty annoyances, and Shelley, all his life, when in good health, and free from the anxieties that so often beset him, was noted for his boyish hilarity. At Mr. Hexter's there were only three fags, Shelley, Amos, and Matthews; Amos had early made the discovery that in the "Mad Shelley" there were seeds to overflowing of meditation deep, and of that wild

originality which is the attribute of genius. He and Shelley used to amuse themselves with composing plays, and acting them before Matthews, who constituted their sole audience; and from the enthusiasm with which Shelley entered into this kind of amusement our informant is of opinion that had the slightest encouragement been given at Eton to merit in English composition, verse or prose, he would have devoted himself with ardour to the studies of the place, and the irregularities of his mind would have been repressed by habits of patient study. In giving instances of the lighter moods of his mind, this writer says:—

"I think I hear, as if it were yesterday, Shelley singing, with a buoyant cheerfulness in which he often indulged, as he might be running nimbly up and down stairs, the witches' song in Macbeth:—

> 'Double, double, toil and trouble;
> Fire burn and cauldron bubble.'"

The poet's natural aptitude for study made up for the little encouragement he received at Eton, and he made great progress notwithstand-

ing. In this the sweetness of his disposition assisted him, "for," says his friend Hogg, "as his port had the meekness of a maiden, so the heart of a young virgin, who had never crossed her father's threshold, to encounter the rude world, could not be more susceptible of all the sweet domestic charities than his."

CHAPTER IV.

Old Walker—His lectures at Eton—Their effect on Shelley — New direction of his mind — The solar microscope — Experimental philosophy — Chemical studies—Correspondence at Eton—A refuted chemist.

Soon after Shelley's arrival at Eton, there was a certain itinerant lecturer, known as Old Walker, who came into the town for the purpose of delivering his usual entertainment, which consisted of a course of lectures of a very popular, and a very desultory character; on Astronomy, Chemistry, and Mechanics, the most attractive part of which, however, was the exhibition of an orrery, a solar microscope, an electrical machine, and other chemical apparatus.

In the first lecture, Shelley was astonished at the minute calculations of the Astronomer, which unfolded the universe to him, and adjusted the exact distances of the planets from each other. But his excited imagination was peculiarly charmed with the idea of a plurality of worlds. Lifted at once into the regions of immensity, he began to expatiate upon the glories and the wonders of creation. "Night became his jubilee; his spirit bounded on the shadow of darkness, and flew to the countless worlds beyond it." In the contemplation of the superior endowments of one planet over the other, he loved to consider our existence but as a state of transition, and that as spirits in a future state, we might proceed from star to star till we had attained to the highest perfection, the nearest to the effulgence of God.

The chemical experiments likewise introduced him to a new world of thought. That earth, air, and water, are not simple elements in themselves, but combinations of matter, under peculiar forms, were truths yet strange to him, exciting his eager curiosity; nor did the exhibition of the solar microscope astonish him less. It taught him that the grand principle of

life is everywhere present, whether in the atoms of the earth, or in the structure of the universe.

It is suggested that Walker's lectures were a misfortune to Shelley, since they supplied him with the means of producing interesting and startling results with very little application of mind, and thereby increased his aversion to the studies of the school. But the same writer hints that had there been some one to guide the peculiar bent that his mind had now taken, instead of allowing it to wander at will, the most favourable consequences might have flowed from it.

As it was, he was allowed to follow his own unguided impulses, and to these lectures may be traced the source and direction of all his after speculations. His imagination was fascinated, his curiosity excited to the utmost, and he plunged with avidity into a course of study which entailed on him in after-life the greatest calamities.

Having his mind now directed to an object, he proceeded with great earnestness. He possessed himself of a solar microscope, which became ever after his constant companion. He

entertained for it a childish affection, as he generally did for anything that afforded him delight. He always carried it with him as he grew up, and it used to form part of his arrangements with his landlord, in taking a house, that he might, if he desired, make a hole through the wall, or otherwise deface a room, so as to receive his solar microscope.

He also procured an electrical machine from Old Walker's assistant, who had picked up a smattering of his master's knowledge, which enabled him to drive a large trade in such things with the boys at Eton.

He now commenced those chemical studies of which so many stories have been told, inquiring into the nature of gases and fluids, and investigating the laws of nature—and so eagerly did he pursue them, that he nearly blew up himself and Mr. Hexter's house into the bargain.

A sagacious reviewer remembered Shelley at Eton as being peculiarly mischievous in setting trees on fire with a burning-glass, and his obtuse intellect took this as sufficient evidence of his love of destruction. Doubtless Shelley's phi-

losophical and chemical experiments were often carried on to the infinite delight of his schoolfellows—for as at Oxford the young chemist in his laboratory seemed to revel in throwing everything into confusion and disorder, staining his hands, his clothes, his books, his furniture, with acids, and burning holes in the carpet, which often caught his foot, and tripped him up, as he paced with characteristic stride across the room in pursuit of truth, piling plates, glasses, cups and saucers, crucibles, retorts, and vessels of various kinds, used as recipients of the most delcterious ingredients, into one heap—so must we regard him at Eton.

Indeed, we have pretty strong evidence that such was the case; for he once told a friend that he had inflicted upon himself a serious injury at Eton, by swallowing inadvertently some mineral poison, left in a vessel used indifferently for mixing lemonade and arsenic. He declared that on this occasion he had not only injured his health at the time, but that he feared he never should recover from the shock it had inflicted on his constitution. It appears, however, that his lively imagination exaggerated the recol-

lection of the unpleasant taste that might arise from taking a minute portion of some poisonous substance by the like chance, for there was no vestige of a more serious or lasting injury in his youthful and healthy, although somewhat delicate aspect.

He took lessons in chemistry of a physician, and to further his minute investigations into the laws of solids and fluids, opened a numerous correspondence with such as were likely to assist him in his studies. Possessing a mind of great metaphysical acuteness, there can be little doubt that the questions he sometimes proposed to his correspondents were of a very startling nature. But his individual character proved an obstacle to his inquiries, even while they were strictly physical. A refuted or irritated chemist suddenly concluded a long correspondence by telling his youthful opponent he would write to his master, and have him flogged—a threat to such a mind as Shelley's calculated far more to create exultation in his triumph over the ignorance of his cowardly opponent than to operate as an intimidation.

However, such things served to render him

more cautious, and he began to address inquiries anonymously, or rather, to ensure an answer, to sign himself Philalethes, and the like; but, even at Eton, the postman does not ordinarily speak Greek—to prevent miscarriages, therefore, it was necessary to adopt a more familiar name, as John Short or Thomas Long.

CHAPTER V.

Physics and metaphysics—Shelley's readings at Eton—De Deo the germ of his scepticism—Dr. Lind—Shelley's early love of boating—His removal from Eton.

It is curious to observe the gradual progress from physics to metaphysics. Indeed, so closely does one seem to wait on the steps of the other, that we might almost suppose it a natural consequence that whoever begins by inquiring into the subtilities of matter, will in the end extend his inquiries into the nature of spiritual essences.

The physician who instructed him was one of his favourite correspondents. Our young philosopher held a high opinion of his talents, and

always spoke of him with profound veneration. He was venerable in years, and belonged to the old school. He confined his epistolary discussions to matters of science, and so for a time did his eager disciple; but when metaphysics usurped the place that physics had before held, the latter gradually fell into dissertations respecting existences still more subtile than gases and the electric fluid.

"Is the electric fluid material?" he would ask his correspondent. "Is light?—Is the vital principle in vegetables?—in brutes?—in the human soul?"

Thus we see him fairly started in his metaphysical inquiries; but while thus occupied, it must not be supposed that he altogether neglected his academical studies. It is true, he never distinguished himself at Eton, for he had no ambition to emulate his fellows in school exercises; but he had been so well grounded in the classics, that with little labour he could get up his daily lessons, and he soon learnt to compose Latin verses with facility.

Of the books he read at this period, we know little; popular works on Chemistry, Astronomy,

and such like, no doubt, formed the principal.

He once wrote to Medwin for a work on Chemistry that he knew to be in his father's library. The book was forwarded to him, but was sent back by the heads of the College, with a message that such were forbidden at Eton—a circumstance which, no doubt, gave a spur to Shelley's inquiries.

He also read with avidity, and greatly admired, the works of Pliny the elder, the enlightened and benevolent, as he styles him. He translated several books into English; and it was his intention to make a complete version of his natural history, but was arrested by the chapters on Astronomy, which Dr. Lind, whom he consulted, told him the best scholars could not understand.

It was from the chapter "De Deo," that he first imbibed his notions respecting the nature of the Deity; one passage particularly struck him: "God must be all sense, all sight, all hearing, all life, all mind, self-existent."

The earnest contemplation of this passage produced the first germ of his scepticism.

He appears to have commenced his acquaintance with Plato at Eton, though Mr. Hogg tells us, "that at Oxford he only read his dialogues in an English translation from the French of Dacier; for taking Dr. Lind to be the original of Zonoras, he must have read with him the Symposium, which is not contained in the English translations from Dacier; he says:—

'Then Plato's words of light in thee and me
Lingered like moonlight in the moonless east;
For we had just then read—my memory
Is faithful now—the story of the feast:
And Agathon and Diotima seemed
From death and dark forgetfulness released.'"

In the intervals of study, Shelley's great delight was in boating, which the near neighbourhood of the Thames enabled him to gratify. Mr. Amos was mostly his companion in these water excursions, until their separate studies so far divided them that they seldom met, and their friendship seems to have been discontinued.

He very early acquired a taste for this kind of amusement, and more than once played truant at Brentford to indulge in his favourite pastime.

A wherry was his ideal of happiness, and leaving his boat to drift, he could indulge his fancy without any interruption.

His taste for the water grew with him as he grew, and on that fatal element were composed or conceived some of his noblest pieces.

Statements are a little contradictory as to his removal from Eton. According to Mr. Leigh Hunt, it was before the regular period, since his unconventional spirit, penetrating, sincere, and demanding the reason and justice of things, was found to be inconvenient; but according to Medwin, from whose loose narrative we gather that he remained there about four years, he was removed because his school education was thought to be completed, and from what follows we may suppose this to have taken place towards the winter of 1809, when Shelley would have commenced his eighteenth year; and notwithstanding what has been said of his life at Eton, it is clear that he quitted that College on very good terms with his fellows, for an unusual number of books, Greek or Latin classics, each inscribed with the donor's name, were presented to him on that occasion; and the parting break-

fast cost him fifty pounds—a fact which will sufficiently vindicate him from the charge of unsociability. He now returned to Castle Goring, where he remained some time prior to his matriculation at Oxford.

CHAPTER VI.

Characteristics of genius—And longing for authorship —Wanderings in St. Leonard's forest—Readings at Castle Goring—Pliny the Elder—French philosophy —Early poetic readings—The Wandering Jew.

SHELLEY is again under the paternal roof, to enjoy the innocent society of his sisters, or to roam about his father's grounds, and indulge the wanderings of his boyish fancy; but he has brought with him this time a world of experience, and his mind is stored with a variety of knowledge which has served, however, rather to excite than to gratify his curiosity.

In the development of his character, they have imparted to it vigour and strength, and the

better prepared him for the great battle which all have to fight, more especially those who are determined to rely on the integrity of their conduct, and to worship truth for its own sake, rather than to square their actions by the conventional rules of society.

One of Shelley's great delights at this period, was wandering about in St. Leonard's forest, the wild legends of which place excited his busy imagination.

An intense love of nature is the peculiar characteristic of the child of genius. The lonely sea-shore, the quiet beauty of sylvan solitudes, the charms of the varied landscape, or the mystic grandeur of forest scenery, were at all times his favourite haunts, and perhaps it may not be incorrect to say that there is a season when the sublime spirit of song casts about its favoured child the shadow of its awful loveliness, investing him with its strange power as Elijah covered Elisha with his mantle; but we are told, at this time, that with the dim presentiment of his future greatness came also a longing for authorship.

Of the active qualities of his mind and its

tendencies, we gain some insight from a note by Medwin, who tells us, "I have a vivid recollection of the walks we took in the winter of 1809. There is something in a frosty day, when the sun is bright, the sky clear, the air rarefied, which produces a kind of intoxication. On such days Shelley's spirits used to run riot, his sweet and subtle talk was to me electric."

While the spark of genius was thus burning brightly, and ready to kindle into a real and tangible existence, it was receiving its proper excitement in the varied studies that he had now fairly entered upon. It is most probable that the first book he read on his return to Castle Goring was the forbidden one at Eton.

The works of Pliny the Elder seem greatly to have attracted him, and we are told that the Chapter "De Deo" was read frequently, and with great attention; we have already seen the effect that one passage had produced upon him, and popular as it was with the youth of his time, it is not improbable that the French school of philosophy served to tincture his mind in his endeavours to search out the nature of the Deity.

His acquaintance with our literature, however, appears to have been very limited at this period; tales of the German school of diablerie, and the outpourings of the Minerva press, seem to have been much more to his taste than the works of our best authors.

The early English poets were almost unknown to him; and though Mrs. Shelley tells us that "the love, and knowledge of nature developed by Wordsworth, the lofty melody and mysterious beauty of Coleridge's poetry,—and the wild, fantastic machinery, and gorgeous scenery adopted by Southey," composed his favourite reading, I am inclined, for want of proper evidence, to place even this at a somewhat later date.

The "marvellous boy" of Bristol seems to have been an early favourite. His successful imposition on Horace Walpole excited his admiration, and Chatterton's sad story won his warmest sympathies.

It is hinted, somewhat plausibly, that the "Leonora" of Burgher first awakened his poetic faculty. A tale of such beauty and terror might well have kindled his lively imagination, but his earliest pieces, written about this time, and con-

sisting only of a few ballads, are deficient in elegance and originality, and give no evidence whatever of that genius which soon after declared itself. They are inferior to the compositions of Byron at the same age, and probably owed their parentage to no higher source than Sir Walter Scott's early ballads and tales.

The desire for authorship seems strongly to have possessed Shelley at this period; and in conjunction with his cousin Medwin, he planned a wild and extravagant romance, in which a hideous witch was to play the most conspicuous part. This was a strange nightmare, and after a few chapters were perpetrated, was abandoned for something more to his taste, in the shape of a metrical tale, entitled "The Wandering Jew."

This is one of the earliest specimens we have of his poetical powers. It was, like the former, a joint composition between himself and Medwin, and in like manner was thrown aside in an unfinished state, and forgotten; but after various accidents and adventures, and after an oblivion of more than twenty years, it ultimately found its way into the pages of Fraser's Magazine.

How much of this poem may be justly attributed to Shelley, it is difficult to decide, nor, perhaps, is it very desirable to know; for, except as a literary curiosity, there is little in it to merit the attention of the critic. It may be observed, however, that Medwin acknowledges that Shelley's contributions to this juvenile production were far the best. The entire manuscript which came into Mr. Fraser's hands, is in Shelley's handwriting; and it appears to have remained in the Poet's possession till his visit to Edinburgh, soon after his first marriage, where it was left in the care of a gentleman, and never reclaimed.

This poem was founded on a German fragment, picked up by Medwin in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and given entire in the notes to Queen Mab, in which poem the "Wandering Jew" is reproduced, in the character of Ahasuerus: indeed, this fragment seems to have made an indelible impression on Shelley's mind, for Ahasuerus was always a favourite character with him, and is again introduced into one of his latest productions, the beautiful lyrical drama of "Hellas."

That the reader may form some idea of the plot of this poem, it will be sufficient to remark that the third canto is almost a metrical version of this fragment, and one or two specimens will suffice to convey an adequate idea of the merits of the composition.

The openings of the first, the second, and the fourth cantos I feel disposed to attribute to Shelley. That of the first is a description of evening:—

"The brilliant orb of parting day
Diffused a rich and mellow ray
Above the mountain's brow;
It tinged the hills with lustrous light,
It tinged the promontory's height,
Still sparkling with the snow;
And as aslant it threw its beam,
Tipt with gold the mountain stream
That laved the vale below.
Long hung the eye of glory there,
And lingered, as if loth to leave
A scene so lovely and so fair.
'Twere luxury even there to grieve.

"All, all was tranquil, all was still,
Save when the music of the rill
Or distant waterfall,
At intervals broke on the ear,
Which Echo's self was charmed to hear,
And ceased her babbling call.

Light clouds in fleeting livery gay,
Hung painted in grotesque array
Upon the western sky.
Forgetful of the approach of dawn,
The peasants danced upon the lawn,
In every measure light and free,
The very soul of harmony.
Light as the dewdrops of the morn,
That hang upon the blossomed thorn."

The second is a description of morning:—

"Fled were the vapours of the night,
Faint streaks of rosy-tinted light
Were painted on the matin grey;
And as the sun began to rise,
To pour his animating ray,
Glowed with fire the eastern skies,
The distant rocks, the far off bay.
The ocean's sweet and lovely blue,
The mountain's variegated breast
Blushing with tender tints of dawn,
Or with fantastic shadows drest,
The waving wood, the opening lawn,
Rise to existence, waked anew,
In colours, exquisite of hue."

More particularly does Shelley's well-known creed seem to find its first utterance in the opening of the fourth canto, the strong belief

of man's capabilities of rendering himself happy, imbued with deep natural religion.

"Ah! why does man, whom God hath sent
As the Creator's ornament,
Who stands amid his works confest,
The first, the noblest, and the best,
Whose vast, whose comprehensive eye,
Is bounded only by the sky,
O'erlooks the charms which nature yields,
The garniture of woods and fields,
The sun's all-vivifying light,
The glory of the moon by night;
And to himself alone a foe,
Forget from whom these blessings flow?
And is there not in friendship's eye,
Beaming with tender sympathy,
An antidote to every woe?
And cannot woman's love bestow
A heavenly paradise below?
Such joys as these to man are given,
And yet you dare to rail at Heaven;
Vainly oppose the Almighty's cause,
Transgress his universal laws,
Forfeit the pleasures that await
The virtuous in this mortal state."

This poem also contains the fragment of a song which is very musical:—

"See yon opening flower
Spreads its fragrance to the blast;
It fades within an hour,
Its decay is pale, is fast.

"Paler is yon maiden,
Faster is her heart's decay;
Deep, with sorrow laden,
She sinks in death away."

It will be seen that there is but little power or originality in the foregoing specimens, though in the last there is a considerable amount of pathos. Compared with many of his tuneful brethren, Shelley appears to have been late in the development of his genius; and while Cowley, Pope, and Chatterton gave to the world compositions of great promise at the respective ages of ten or twelve, and while Byron and Scott were writing graceful stanzas at thirteen or fourteen, Shelley's powers did not expand till his fifteenth, or perhaps his sixteenth year,—nor did they exhibit great promise even then.

It is worthy of note, that this poem, in its incomplete state, was forwarded to Thomas Campbell, with a request that he would favour its author with his candid opinion upon its merits. Campbell "good-naturedly read it," says a reviewer, "and with pardonable disho-

nesty pronounced that there were but two good lines in the whole piece, which ran thus :—

> " It seemed as if some angel's sigh,
> Had breathed the plaintive symphony ;"—

a verdict which so far damped the ardour of the young enthusiast, as to make him for the present resign all hope of a poetical career.

CHAPTER VII.

Zastrozzi — St. Irvyne, or the Rosicrucian — General view of those productions—Shelley's correspondence with Felicia Browne—Its abrupt termination.—His matriculation at Oxford,

On the ill success of this effort we find Shelley engaged in the less difficult task of prose composition, in the form of a wild and extravagant romance entitled "Zastrozzi." This also was a joint authorship; but instead of Medwin, he had chosen, in this instance, his beautiful cousin, Harriette Grove, to share his literary labours. That such a partnership was more congenial to his temperament there can be but little doubt; that it gave a colouring to his

thoughts and images is not improbable; but the circumstances attending this fellowship I shall have occasion to mention at a future period.

The novel itself is very crude, and unworthy of a place among his collected works. The sentiments and language, as Mrs. Shelley truly observes, are exaggerated — the composition imitative and poor, abounding in such passages as "the crashing thunder now rattled madly above, the lightnings flashed a larger curve, and at intervals, through the surrounding gloom, shewed a scathed larch, which, blasted by frequent storms, reared its bare head on a height above."

We are, however, enabled to trace the religious bias of the author's mind at the date of its composition. Through a long labyrinth of crime, of doubt, of disbelief, it brings the heroine to the acknowledgment of the sublime truths of religion, and inculcates the doctrine that by earnest prayer and repentance the greatest sinner will find acceptance into the mercy of God—a belief which the most intolerant person would be lothe to cavil with.

This novel was followed rapidly by a second,

probably by the same joint authorship, bearing the title of "St. Irvyne, or the Rosicrucian." It is similar in style to the first one, though it marks progression. It is strongly tinctured with Shelley's metaphysical notions, and is sometimes made the medium of his speculations.

Captain Medwin tells us that this was suggested by "St. Leon," a work which he had read till he believed there was truth in alchemy and the elixir vitæ. Several ballads and songs are introduced in St. Irvyne, but their composition belongs to an earlier date. They are the first of his productions, and have already been alluded to.

In looking over these juvenile efforts, they do not appear such as we might expect at any period of the history of a genius like Shelley's. In the poem, as we have seen, there are some exceptional passages, which, like the first faint streaks of dawn, betray the sun of glorious poesy yet lingering below the horizon; but the novels only deserve to be numbered among the curiosities of literature, as specimens of the failure of the untutored efforts of genius. Hitherto his desultory readings had so far vitiated

his taste, that, instead of presenting the unfinished outline of a stately fabric, he has given us but little more than the outpourings of a disordered imagination; and when we expect, from our knowledge of his powers and his classical acquirements, that, like the true alchymist, he would present us, however roughly, with only pure gold, we discover little more than base metal.

As these productions exhibit the creative faculty, they are but monstrous births, or entirely abortive; and, though the various passions of the human heart are attempted, as love, hatred, malice, revenge, hope, or despair, together with the powers of religion, the whisperings of immortality, and the terrors of the grave, they stand out from the canvass only to expose the grotesque garb in which they are clad.

Viewing them as works of art, we can trace in them, not even in the smallest degree, that fine scholarly elegance, and stately poetic diction, which rendered his prose worthy specimens of English composition. But it must be acknowledged also, that, under a rude exterior, we discover the germ of thought, and high moral sentiment that afterwards ennobled the nature

of our poet. There is the same keen perception of right and wrong, the same idolatrous worship he paid to the characters of women, the same ideas respecting marriage and the sanctity of love, the same sympathy with suffering which form the principal charm to those who would trace out the history of his mind.

Besides these more serious literary labours, Shelley found time to carry on a rather extensive correspondence with Felicia Browne, who had just presented the world with her first volume. He had become acquainted with her poetry through Medwin, and, as was his practice on such occasions, he wrote her a complimentary letter to express his admiration of her powers, to which she replied, and a frequent intercommunication was the result, which was, however, at length abruptly closed, at the particular desire expressed by the young lady's mother to Shelley's father, for what reason is not stated; but the supposition is, that, their correspondence turning upon metaphysical subjects, he had succeeded in inoculating the young poetess with his sceptical philosophy.

In after-years, Shelley was noted for the

rapidity with which he wrote; and it is clear that he was by no means idle during the twelve months which he spent at this time at Castle Goring, the result being the first chapters of a wild romance, afterwards abandoned for the "Wandering Jew," of which we are told seven cantos were completed, four of which only have been preserved, and the two novels, each consisting of a volume, "Zastrozzi" and "St. Irvyne, or the Rosicrucian," the latter of which was not published till after he had entered at University College, Oxford, where he was matriculated at the commencement of Michaelmas term in October, 1810.

CHAPTER VIII.

Shelley at Oxford—Becomes acquainted with Mr. Hogg —Amusing anecdote of their first meeting—Lecture on mineralogy—Shelley's speculative theories—Contempt for mathematics—Metaphysics.

We now enter upon one of the most interesting, as well as one of the best-authenticated periods of Shelley's life. It extends only over a period of six months, yet is it replete with incident. Here commenced his strife with men and manners, with the usages and received notions of society; and the delightful record of his collegiate friend Hogg, interspersed as it is with most varied and most amusing anecdote, is our unfailing guide.

Shelley was little more than eighteen on his arrival at Oxford, and though on the eve of manhood, his slight, fragile figure, his small features,

his delicate, but ruddy complexion, rendered him much younger in appearance than he really was, though his general demeanour imparted to his otherwise girlish appearance an air of superiority which was exceedingly attractive. ...

"There breathed in his features," says his friend, "an animation, a fire, an enthusiasm, a vivid and preternatural intelligence; and wearing a great profusion of long, brown, wavy locks, through which, in the intensity of thought, he would rapidly pass his fingers, gave him an appearance singularly wild and peculiar. Nor was the moral expression less beautiful than the intellectual; for there was a softness, a delicacy, a gentleness, and especially (though this will surprise many) that air of profound religious veneration, which characterises the best works, and chiefly the frescoes of the great masters of Florence and Rome."

He was duly entered and installed in his rooms situate at the corner next the hall of the principal quadrangle, a spot which has since been reverently visited by many a votary of the Muses.

A very miscellaneous collection accompanied him to his new retreat, but it was highly charac-

teristic of the young student. We are not informed of the kind of reading he took with him, but should imagine it to have been as varied as his studies, commencing with the book of Holy Writ, and ending with the "System of Nature."

"Probably it was about this time," to use the expression of Capt. Medwin, "that he drenched his spirit with the metrical beauty of 'Thalaba,'" and made himself acquainted with the revolutionary poetry of that period. It seems, however, certain, that Locke and Hume, and Pliny and Plato, held a very conspicuous position among his readings.

We are better acquainted with other equipages that accompanied him, in the way of chemical apparatus and philosophical instruments, necessary for the complete pursuit of his studies in experimental and practical philosophy, among which might be numbered a solar microscope, an electrical machine, a galvanic trough, an air pump, and drugs innumerable, with which he soon converted his rooms, newly-decorated, and expensively furnished for his reception, into the laboratory of a chemist.

Although something of the fame of Shelley's

exploits, or rather mishaps, in this latter department had gone before him, many who knew him at Eton, having preceded him at Oxford—when he reached that college he was personally unknown to any of its members; but his acquaintance with Mr. Hogg commenced at the very outset, and it is to their close and uninterrupted intimacy, that we are indebted for all the particulars of the poet's collegiate life.

The manner of their first meeting is amusing and characteristic.

Mr. Hogg, one day in the early part of the term, found himself seated at dinner in the hall next to a "fresh-man," whose appearance and general demeanour were remarkably youthful, even at that table, where all were very young. He seemed to have no acquaintance with any one, and, while he ate and drank sparingly, his manner was thoughtful and absent.

Contrary to the usual reserve maintained at college, Mr. Hogg addressed the companion he found next to him, and a conversation commencing with common-places, merged by degrees into topics of mutual interest.

They soon found themselves in the heat of a

discussion on the merits of German literature. Hogg spoke of it disparagingly, asserting the want of nature in German writers, while his opponent claimed for them great originality, expressing especially, enthusiastic admiration for their imaginative and poetical productions.

"What modern literature," said he, "will you compare to theirs?"

Mr. Hogg named the Italian. This roused all the stranger's impetuosity; so eager grew the dispute, that the servants came to clear the tables, before they were aware that they had been left alone. Observing that it was time to quit the hall, Mr. Hogg invited his opponent to finish the discussion at his rooms; he eagerly assented, but lost the thread of his discourse on the way, and the whole of his enthusiasm in the cause of Germany; for no sooner had they arrived, than he said calmly, he was not qualified to maintain such a discussion, being alike ignorant of Italian and German, having only read the works of the Germans in translations, and but little of Italian poetry, even at secondhand. Mr. Hogg confessed, with equal ingenuousness, that he knew nothing of German, and but little of Italian; that he also

had spoken through others, and had hitherto seen only by the glimmering light of translations.

In the eloquent dialogue that ensued upon this candid confession, Shelley, for it was he, spoke disparagingly of the study of languages, both ancient and modern, declaring it to be waste of time—merely learning words and the names of things, instead of things themselves; and pronounced the physical sciences, more especially Chemistry, the highest order of study.

He continued to discourse on this latter subject in the most enthusiastic manner, sometimes sitting, sometimes standing by the fire, sometimes pacing about the room with long, rapid strides, exciting the admiration and surprise of his new acquaintance, who, notwithstanding his due appreciation of the powers and aspiration of his extraordinary guest, seemed to calculate upon the impossibilities of their ever becoming intimate; for his voice, he tells us, "was excruciating, intolerably shrill, harsh, and discordant," and beyond the power of human endurance.

As they continued discoursing, the clock gave notice that it was a quarter to seven; when Shelley suddenly exclaimed: "I must go to a

lecture on mineralogy; declaring, enthusiastically that he expected to derive much pleasure and instruction from it.

Hogg says, "I am ashamed to own that the cruel voice made me hesitate for a moment, but it was impossible to omit so indispensible a civility. I invited him to return to tea. He gladly assented; snatched his cap, and hurried out of the room with a promise that he would soon return.

"At the lapse of an hour he suddenly re-appeared, running quickly, burst into the room, threw down his cap, and as he stood shivering, and chafing his hands, declared how much he had been disappointed at the lecture.

"'I went away,' he said in a shrill whisper, and with an arch look, 'before the lecture was finished. I stole away, for it was so stupid, and I was so cold that my teeth chattered. The professor saw me, and appeared displeased. I thought I could get out without being observed, but struck my knee against a bench and made a noise, and he looked at me. I am determined he shall never see my face again.'

"'What did the man talk about?' demanded Hogg.

"About stones, about stones!" he answered with a downcast look and a melancholy tone, as if about to say something excessively profound. 'About stones, stones, stones, nothing but stones, and so drily. It was wonderfully tiresome; and stones are not interesting things in themselves.'

Having imbibed several cups of tea, which with him was a favourite beverage, and soon afterwards, as was the custom, partaken of supper, he recovered from his disappointment, and entering into an animated conversation upon his favourite science, proclaimed the manifold advantages to be derived from the study of Chemistry. He spoke in glowing language of the great discoveries that had been made in that department; and as he warmed in his subject, broke out in a splendid peroration.

"'Is not the time of by far the larger portion of the human species,' he inquired, with his fervid manner and in his piercing tones, 'wholly consumed in severe labour? and is not this devotion of our race—of the whole of our race, I may say—for those who, like ourselves, are indulged with an exemption from the hard lot,

are so few in comparison with the rest, that they scarcely deserve to be taken into the account, absolutely necessary to procure subsistence, so that men have no leisure for recreation, or the high improvement of the mind?

"'Yet this incessant toil is still inadequate to procure an abundant supply of the common necessaries of life. Some are doomed actually to want them, and many are compelled to be content with an insufficient provision. We know little of the peculiar nature of those substances which are proper for the nourishment of animals. We are ignorant of the qualities that make them fit for this end.

"'Analysis has advanced so rapidly of late, that we may confidently anticipate that we shall soon discover wherein their aptitude really consists. Having ascertained the cause, we shall now be able to command it, and to produce at pleasure the desired effects.

"'It is easy, even in our present state of ignorance, to reduce our ordinary food to carbon, or to lime, a moderate advancement in chemical science will speedily enable us, we may hope, to create, with equal facility, food from substances

that appear at present ill-adapted to sustain us. Water, like the atmospheric air, is compounded of certain gases;—in the progress of scientific discovery, a simple and sure method of manufacturing the useful fluid in any quantity, and in every situation, may be detected. The arid deserts of Africa may be refreshed by a copious supply, and be transformed at once into rich meadows, and vast fields of maize and rice.

"'The generation of heat is a mystery; but we may hope soon to understand the causes of combustion, so far as to provide ourselves cheaply, with a fund of heat, that will supersede our costly and inconvenient fuel. We could not determine, without actual experiments, whether an unknown substance were combustible; when we shall have thoroughly investigated the properties of fire, it may be, we shall be qualified to communicate to clay, to stones, and to water itself a chemical recomposition, that will render them as inflammable as wood, coals and oil.

"'What a comfort would it be to the poor at all times, especially at this season, if we were capable of solving this problem alone, if we could furnish them with a competent supply of heat.

"'These speculations may appear wild, to persons who have not extended their views of what is practicable, by closely watching science in its onward course; but there are many mysterious powers, many irrresistible agents, with the existence and with some of the phenomena of which all are acquainted.

"'What a mighty instrument would electricity be in the hands of one who knew how to direct its omnipotent energies; and we may command an indefinite quantity of fluid, by means of electric kites, we may draw down the lightning from Heaven.

"'The galvanic battery is a new engine: yet has it wrought wonders already. What will not an extraordinary combination of troughs of colossal magnitude, a well-arranged system of hundreds of metallic plates effect?

"'The balloon has not yet achieved the perfection of which it is surely capable; the art of navigating the air, is in its first and most helpless infancy; at present it is a mere toy, a feather in comparison with the splendid anticipations of the philosophical chemist. Yet it promises prodigious facilities for locomotion, and will

enable us to traverse vast tracts with ease and rapidity.

"'Why are we ignorant of the interior of Africa? Why do we not dispatch intrepid aëronauts, to cross it in every direction, and to survey the whole Peninsula in a few weeks? The shadow of the first balloon, which a vertical sun would project precisely underneath it, as it glided silently over that hitherto unhappy country would virtually emancipate every slave, and annihilate slavery for ever.'

When he at last paused in his eloquent discourse, Hogg ventured to suggest, that the Mathematician had equal faith in the honours and advantages of his studies. Whereupon his guest declared he knew nothing of mathematics; but treated the notion of their paramount importance with contempt.

"'What do you say of metaphysics?' continued Hogg.

"'Aye, metaphysics!' he replied in a solemn tone, and with a mysterious air; 'that is a noble study indeed. If it were possible to make any discoveries there, they would disclose the analysis of mind, and not of mere matter.'

"Then rising from his chair, he paced slowly about the room, and discoursed of souls, with still greater animation and vehemence than he had displayed in treating of gases. Of a future state, and especially of a former state—of pre-existence, observed for a time through the suspension of consciousness—of personal identity, and also of ethical philosophy,—in a deep and earnest tone of elevated morality, until he suddenly remarked that the fire was nearly out, and that the candles were glimmering inheir sockets, when he hastily apologized for remaining so long."

CHAPTER IX.

Mr. Hogg visits Shelley in his own rooms—Description of his rooms—Shelley's acquirements in chemistry—The electric machine—Simplicity of the poet's life—His desire for knowledge.

THE young collegians at once took to each other, and arranged for their next meeting at Shelley's rooms. "I promised," says his not less enthusiastic friend, "to visit the Chemist in his laboratory; the Alchymist in his study; the Wizard in his cave; not at breakfast that day, for it was already one, but in twelve hours, one hour after noon, to hear some of the secrets of nature, and for that purpose he told me his name, and described the situation of his rooms.

I lighted him down stairs as well as I could with the stump of the candle, and I soon heard him running through the quiet Quadrangle in the still night.

"That sound became, afterwards, so familiar to my ear, that I still seem to hear Shelley's hasty steps."

With such preternatural energy of character, such wild but brilliant speculations, such impetuous enthusiasm, did he present himself, for the first time, to Hogg. It was impossible he should not be fascinated by a being so extraordinary.

On visiting him at his rooms the next day, he seemed suffering that depression which often weighs down the heart of a lonely student, or usually follows some great excitement. He was cowering over the fire, with his feet resting on the fender, presenting a most dejected appearance.

He rose, and after seizing the arm of his visitor with both hands, to give him a cordial welcome, resumed his seat, his limbs trembling, and his teeth chattering with the cold.

The scout who was occupied in the vain endeavour of putting his room in order soon retired, when Shelley, with a sidelong look towards the door, exclaimed, with a deep sigh:

"Thank God, that fellow is gone at last! If you had not come he would have put everything in my rooms in some place where I should never have found it again."

That the poor scout was much puzzled to find a proper place for everything, may well be imagined, for whatever qualities Shelley possessed, order certainly was not one of them; and notwithstanding the exertions of the officious scout, scarcely a single article was in its proper position.

Books, boots, papers, shoes, philosophical instruments, clothes, pistols, linen, crockery, ammunition, phials innumerable, with money, stockings, prints, crucibles, bags and boxes, were scattered on the floor and in every place, as if the young chemist, in order to analyse the mysteries of Creation, had endeavoured first to reconstruct the primeval chaos.

The tables, and especially the carpet, were

already stained with large spots of various hues, which frequently proclaimed the agency of fire. The electric machine, air pump, galvanic trough, solar microscope, were conspicuous among the mass of matter.

Upon the table, by his side, were some books, lying open, several letters, a bundle of new pens, and a bottle of japan ink, that served as an ink-stand, a piece of deal, lately part of the lid of a box, with many chips, and a handsome razor, that had been used as a knife.

There were bottles of soda-water, sugar, pieces of lemon, and the traces of an effervescent beverage. Two piles of books supported the tongs, and these upheld a small glass retort, above an Argand lamp, which soon boiled over, its contents adding fresh stains to the table, emitting a most disagreeable odour. Shelley snatched the glass quickly, and dashing it in pieces among the ashes under the grate, increased the unpleasant and penetrating effluvium.

He now proceeded to exhibit to his visitor the various apparatus he was possessed of, explaining in his vehement manner their peculiar powers and capabilities; and presently standing

on a stool with glass legs, he desired Hogg to work the electric machine till he was filled with the fluid, so that his long, wild locks bristled and stood on end.

Afterwards he charged a powerful battery, labouring with vast energy, and discoursing with increased vehemence of the marvellous powers of electricity, of thunder and lightning, informing him of the many grand projects he had in hand.

Thus, by mere accident, at the very commencement of his career, he had formed an intimacy which was the only one he did form at Oxford, and from this date the two young students lived together in the greatest harmony, for, while Hogg modestly tells us, that only in one respect could he pretend to resemble Shelley, namely, in an ardent desire to gain knowledge, he speaks of our poet as being a whole university in himself, pursuing every kind of knowledge with an unwearied appetite, and the more abstruse, so much the more did it excite his faculties.

Here he might have pursued a quiet and studious life, rendered delightful by the association of a literary friendship, had not other cir-

cumstances exercised a baneful influence. As it was, by the almost celestial vigour of his genius, by the extreme simplicity of his manner and habits, he early became a distinguished ornament, as well as an example in the college to which he was attached, exhibiting a mind equally favored by the Muses, the Graces, and Philosophy.

Though not yet a disciple of Pythagoras, his food was plain, and simple as that of a hermit, and, says his friend, "had a parent desired his children to be trained to an ascetic life, and taught by an eminent example 'to scorn delights and live laborious days,' that they should behold a pattern of native innocence, and genuine simplicity of manners, he would have consigned them to Shelley's care, as to a temple."

The benevolence of his nature would often prompt him to inquire upon what grounds man could justify taking the life of inferior animals, if not in self-defence.

"Not only have considerable sects," he would say, "denied the right altogether, but those among the tender-hearted and imaginative people of antiquity, who accounted it lawful to kill and eat, appear to have doubted whether they might

take away life for the use of man alone. They slew their cattle, not merely for human guests, like the less scrupulous butchers of modern times, but only as a sacrifice for the honour, and in the name of the Deity, or rather of those subordinate divinities to whom, as they believed, the Supreme Being had assigned the creation and conservation of the visible material world. As an incident to these pious offerings, they partook of the residue of the victims, of which, without such sanction and sanctification, they would not have presumed to taste, so reverent was the custom of a humane and venerable antiquity."

In this way did he anticipate the austere life he afterwards adopted. With such simplicity of manners, he delighted in the seclusion of his beloved study, and in proportion as he found his friend did not sympathise in his chemical operations, which, indeed, he regarded in the light of toys, he dropped them for studies of a severer nature.

He often spoke with regret to his friend, that the period of their collegiate life should be limited to four years. "I wish," he would say,

"that for our sake they would revive the old term of six or seven years. If we consider how much there is to learn, we shall allow that the longer period would still be far too short." These reflections would often weigh upon his heart.

CHAPTER X.

Close intimacy of Shelley and Hogg—Their mode of study — Country rambles — Shelley's love of pistol practice—Aquatic amusements—Paper boat building.

THE young students commenced their intimacy by an exchange of visits, but as our poet, at this period of his life, was not satisfied unless at any moment he could start from his seat, seize the electric-machine, the air-pump, or other apparatus, to ascertain, on the instant, the value of any new idea that rushed into his brain, they soon agreed mutually that Shelley's rooms should be their place of meeting; and here they met, daily at the

hour of one, passing the afternoon and evening together.

That these were days and nights of rejoicing, passed not only in the letter but in the spirit of Epicurus's creed, made brilliant by the charms of intellect, and softened by the mellow light of "divine philosophy," cannot be doubted; for whenever we inquire into his character it is but to have our own hearts drawn the closer to him by the nobleness, the gentleness, or the innocence of his nature.

Their conversations were upon all subjects falling under the denomination of literary or scientific; but whether upon poetry or history, metaphysics or chemistry, whether to discuss the more abstruse questions of theology, or the abstract sciences, he was equally animated, loving disquisition for its own sake.

But their individual studies were in no way interrupted by these continual meetings; for when they came to know each other, they frequently read apart, at their separate vocations, for many hours; or when it so happened that their studies were similar, they read together, thus passing the time in delightful communion,

and the interchange of thought. Moreover, there was one remarkable peculiarity of our poet, which enabled his friend to pursue his private studies without interruption.

In the evening, Shelley's overwrought brain, wearied with intense application, desired repose, and gathering himself up, like a child, on the hearthrug, exposing his little round head to the heat of a large fire, he would sleep soundly, talking sometimes incoherently, for three or four hours, during which time Hogg took tea, and read or wrote, without interruption. He would, he says, interpose shelter to protect his head from the heat of the fire, but rarely with any permanent effect; for the sleeper usually contrived to turn himself, and roll again to the spot where the fire glowed the brightest.

Not less did he love disquisitions in the open air than by the fireside; for, sometimes, when they met at one, they would start out for a ramble across the country, when he would enter upon a most animated discussion, as though the bracing air imparted fresh vigour to his thoughts.

Of this an example will exhibit at once the

rich poetic vein, as well as the delicacy of his bright creations.

They came once unawares upon a beautiful trim garden, where, though in the depth of winter, a great variety of flowers were in bloom. Compared to the surrounding desolation of the country, this had a peculiar effect on his imagination.

He considered that such a delightful spot could only be the retreat of love, and desired to believe it watched over by two tutelary nymphs, and, pausing for a moment to reflect, he exclaimed, thoughtfully:

"No—the seclusion is too sweet, too holy, to be the theatre of ordinary love; the love of the sexes, however pure, still retains some taint of earthly grossness. We must not admit it within the sanctuary."

He was silent. "The love of a mother for her child is more refined, it is more disinterested, more spiritual;" but he added, after some reflection, "the very existence of the child still connects it with the passion we have discarded," and he relapsed into his former musings.

"The love a sister bears towards a sister,"

he exclaimed, abruptly, and with an air of triumph, "is unexceptionable." The idea pleased him; and he strode along, describing their appearance, their habits, their feelings, as they presided over his fairy garden.

"In no other relation," he said, "could the intimacy be equally perfect. Not even between brothers, for their life is less domestic, there is a separation in their pursuits, and an independence in the masculine character.

"The occupations of all females of the same age and rank are the same; and, by night, sisters cherish each other in the same quiet nest. Their union wears not only the grace of delicacy, but of fragility also, for it is always liable to be suddenly destroyed by the marriage of either party, or, at least, to be interrupted, and suspended for an indefinite period."

It is supposed, not without reason, that this beautiful picture was drawn from the remembrance of the love of his own sisters.

If in his home amusements it seemed probable that, in the rash ardour of experiments, he would some day set the college on fire, or that he would poison himself, which was more likely,

his out-of-door exercises were not attended with less danger.

In the young philosopher's long country rambles, he mostly carried with him a pair of duelling-pistols, and a good supply of powder and ball; and when he arrived at some convenient spot, he would fasten a card or a piece of money to a tree, and amuse himself by firing at it, which led his friend often to fear that, as a trifling episode in his varied and contradictory occupations, he would some day shoot himself or both of them.

After repeated but unavailing solicitations, Shelley one day induced him to try his hand in this art, and, says Hogg, "I took up a pistol and asked him what I should aim at; and, observing a slab of wood, as big as a hearth-rug, standing against a wall, I named it, as being a proper object.

"He said it was much too far off, and it was better to wait till we came nearer; but I answered, 'I may as well fire here as anywhere,' and instantly discharged the pistol. To my infinite surprise, the ball struck the elm target, actually in the very centre."

Shelley was delighted at the apparent skill of his friend, which he greatly extolled; and, after curiously examining the hole where the bullet had lodged many times, and measuring the distance, begged he would instruct him in an art in which he so much excelled.

Hogg suffered him to enjoy his wonder many days, and though he had seldom fired a pistol before, Shelley could not easily be convinced that his success was purely accidental.

Another great source of delight in those country rambles was of a more harmless character, affording an example of that unsophisticated innocence, and infantine simplicity, so often remarked as attendant on the great family of genius.

There was a favourite pond at the foot of Shotover Hill, to which Shelley would often shape his course, and loiter about its edge till dusk, gazing in silence on the waters, or repeating verses aloud, or earnestly discussing themes that had no connection with surrounding objects.

Sometimes he would cast a huge stone, as large as he could lift, into the water, and,

watching quietly the gradually dying circles occasioned by the splash, would gravely remark:

"Such are the effects of an impulse on the air."

Sometimes he would collect a number of pieces of flat slate, for the purpose of making ducks and drakes, counting with the utmost glee the number of bounds they made, as they skimmed the surface of the pond.

More particularly did he delight, when he approached the edge of a pool, or even of a small puddle, in making paper boats, and sending them adrift over its surface, watching their progress with intense anxiety.

For this amusement every available material was employed, in the shape of the covers of letters, the fly-leaves of the portable volumes which usually accompanied him in his rambles, then letters of little value; and even those from his most esteemed correspondents, although eyed wistfully, and often returned to his pocket, were frequently sent in pursuit of his former squadrons.

While exulting in this singular sport, he would keep his friend waiting, shivering with

cold, unable or unwilling to interfere with so harmless an amusement. On one occasion, famished, and frozen, and in despair, at his never-ending toil at boat-building, he exclaimed:

"Shelley, there is no use in talking to you; you are the Demiurgus of Plato!" He instantly caught up the whole flotilla, which lay at his feet, ready to be set afloat, and bounding homeward, with mighty strides, laughed aloud, laughed like a giant, as he used to say.

CHAPTER XI.

The Scolloped Oysters — Shelley's Contrition — The Restitution and the Reparation—His love of Children —Faith in the Platonic Philosophy—Anecdote of a little girl—Doctrine of Pre-existence—Shelley's simplicity of character—Group of Gipsies—Eccentricities of the Poet—His kindness of heart—Salutation of the Gipsy Boy— Shelley's blue coat — A mishap—The Poet's anger.

RETURNING one evening, later than usual, from a long country ramble, a large dish of scolloped oysters had been prepared for their supper, and set within the fender to keep hot. They eagerly crouched to the fire for warmth, when Shelley, setting his feet upon the fender, turned it over, and upset the oysters in the grate.

"It was impossible," says his friend, "that a hungry and frozen pedestrian should restrain a strong expression of indignation, or that he

should forbear, notwithstanding the exasperation of cold and hunger, from smiling and forgiving the accident, at seeing the whimsical air and aspect of the offender, as he held up with the shovel the long anticipated food, deformed with ashes, coals and cinders, with a ludicrous expression of exaggerated surprise, disappointment, and contrition."

A scanty supply of cheese was all that remained to appease their hunger, and this Shelley refused to partake of, declaring it was offensive to his palate; but finding that Hogg was inexorable in only partaking of his share, he greedily devoured his portion, rind and all, after scraping it cursorily with a curious tenderness; they wearily sat over the blazing fire, stretching their frozen limbs, and dropping occasionally some languid expression.

On a sudden Shelley started from his seat, seized one of the candles, and began to walk about the room on tiptoe, in profound silence, evidently engaged in some mysterious search; he continued his whimsical and secret inquisition in the bedroom and the little study.

It had occurred to him that possibly a dessert

had been sent to his rooms in his absence, and put away. He was not mistaken, for presently he returned, bearing some small dishes, with oranges, apples, almonds and raisins, and a little cake.

These he set by the side of his friend, without speaking, and with the air of a penitent making restitution and reparation, and then resumed his seat.

The unexpected succour was very seasonable; this light fare, a few glasses of negus, warmth, and especially rest, restored their lost vigour and their spirits.

Relating to this period are some anecdotes of his kindness and humanity, not only to his own species, but to the dumb creatures of the earth, dependent on man, for good or evil, for pleasure or pain. But these I pass over, thus briefly alluding to them to exhibit him as he stood in relation to the poor and friendless.

I will first remark, that like all who are truly good, his love for children was deep, earnest and religious. They were endeared to him by his strong faith in the Platonic philosophy; and he used to say that every true Platonist must be a

lover of children, for they are our masters and instructors in philosophy.

In his walks he would often pause—I am again quoting from those delightful papers—to admire the country people, and after gazing on a sweet and intelligent countenance, he would exhibit in the language, and with an aspect of acute anguish, his intense feeling of the future sorrows and sufferings of all the manifold evils of life, that too often distort, by a mean and most disagreeable expression, the innocent, happy, and engaging lineaments of youth.

He sometimes stopped to observe the softness and simplicity that the face and gestures of a gentle girl displayed, and he would surpass her gentleness by his own.

Strolling one day in the neighbourhood of Oxford, he was attracted by a little girl; he turned aside, and stood and observed her in silence. She was about six years of age, small and slight, bare headed, bare legged, and her apparel variegated and tattered.

She was busily employed collecting empty snail shells — so much occupied, indeed, that some moments elapsed before she turned her face

towards him. When she did, Shelley was struck by the vivid intelligence of her wild and swarthy countenance, and by the sharp glance of her fierce black eyes; she was evidently a young gipsy.

"How much intellect is here," he exclaimed; "in how humble a vessel, and what an unworthy occupation for a person who once knew perfectly the whole circle of the sciences —" this was in accordance with his doctrines of pre-existence;—"who has forgotten them all, it is true, but who could certainly recollect them, although most probably she will never do so."

On another occasion he saw one of these wild children of nature, apparently abandoned, leaning against a bank, oppressed with cold and hunger.

Shelley at once concluded, with his usual precipitation, from the little girl's desolate and wretched appearance, that it had been deserted; and began proposing different schemes to his companion for its permanent relief.

It seemed desirable to procure it some food, and climbing a hill close by, they discovered a cottage, not far from the spot. Shelley induced

the child, with difficulty, to accompany him thither; and, having arrived, procured some warm milk.

"It was a strange spectacle," remarks his companion, "to watch the young Poet, whilst with the enthusiastic, and earnest manner that characterizes the legitimate brethren of the celestial art, holding the wooden-bowl in one hand and the wooden-spoon in the other, and kneeling on his left knee, that he might more conveniently feed, and encourage the timid child to eat."

Returning to the spot where they found her, they saw some people anxiously looking for their child; and learnt that she had only been left there while they went on a journey, and did not wish to fatigue the child; which accounted for her apparent desertion.

Shelley appears to have contracted a kind of intimacy with some of the sunny children of this despised race; for passing one day, where a group had pitched their tent, to contemplate the weather-beaten visages that gathered round a fire of blazing faggots, while preparing with primitive simplicity their rude meal, he recognised a little boy and girl he had met

before, and they recognizing him, ran laughing into the tent.

The kindly-hearted young poet waved his hand to the little gipsy girl, and looking archly from under the thick falls of her black hair, she acknowledged the recognition, in the same artless manner, then retreated again into the tent. Shelley darted in after them, to the surprise and consternation of the swarthy patriarchs of her tribe, who were unused to this familiarity, particularly from the sons of the high-born, with patrician blood flowing in their veins.

Soon after, as he pursued his walk, on turning a narrow lane, he was surprised by a stripe on his back, and looking round, discovered the little boy had stealthily followed him, and gently saluting him in this manner, with the bramble he held in his hand, retreated shyly to the hedge with a familiar and inviting smile on his sunny features.

The poet soon understood the rude welcome to the woods and green lanes, and taking an orange from his pocket, rolled it along the ground, which the boy pursuing, soon caught up, and ran away, delighted with his golden prize.

It might be presumed, from these amiable delineations of character, that Shelley was troubled with none of those infirmities which we usually hear spoken of as the "irritabilities of genius." Not so; for, however he succeeded afterwards in the art of self-government, perhaps of all others, the most difficult, his control over himself at this period was very imperfect, which the following anecdote, by way of contrast, will sufficiently illustrate:—

Though extremely indifferent to dress, generally appearing with his clothes tumbled, and unbrushed, or stained with acids, there was a certain neatness in our poet which induced him mostly to have his garments made in the approved fashion.

Calling one day at the usual hour of noon, Mr. Hogg found Shelley very busy with his tailor, fitting on a new blue coat with bright buttons. With its fit and general appearance he was evidently much delighted, and proposing to go for a walk, declared his intention of keeping it on.

Sallying forth, they had not proceeded far, when, to avoid a muddy road, they crossed a

farm-yard, unwittingly intruding on the domain of a large mastiff, which, making a spring at Shelley, seized him by the skirts of his coat, which, in his endeavour to release himself, were completely torn off, right across the body. He was exceedingly irritated, declaring he would shoot the dog, and proceed at law against the owner; but not having his pistols with him, which perhaps, in his admiration of the new coat he had forgotten, as they usually accompanied him, he determined to return at once to the college to procure them, for the sanguinary purpose of destroying the unfortunate culprit.

His friend endeavoured to divert his anger. "Let us try to fancy," he said, as he was posting homeward in indignant silence, "that we have been at Oxford, and have come back again, and that you have just laid the beast low, and what then?"

The angry poet was silent, but by the gradual slackening of his speed, it was to be observed that his anger had abated. At last he stopped, and taking the skirts from his arm, spread them upon the hedge, stood gazing at them with a mournful aspect, sighed deeply,

and after a few moments, continued his march.

"Would it not be better to take the skirts with us?" his friend suggested.

"No," he answered despondingly, "let them remain as a spectacle for men and gods;" and they proceeded onwards, avoiding as much as possible the principal streets, as they entered Oxford, not to expose, more than was needful, the unphilosophical appearance of the disciple of Plato: but his companion had purloined the skirts from the hedge unperceived, and when they arrived home, despatched them to the tailor with the coat, for which, though generally utterly indifferent to dress, Shelley had, from some strange caprice, conceived a great fondness.

In the evening, the poet was equally astonished, and delighted to see the same coat produced to him, to all appearance as perfect as it was in the morning, as if the tailor had consumed the new blue coat in one of his crucibles, and suddenly raised it, by magical incantation, a perfect Phœnix from the ashes.

CHAPTER XII.

Shelley's affection for his mother and sisters—Sly relish for a joke—Scholastic duties—Poetic effusions—His friends' criticism—Proposition concerning them—Successful hoax.

SUCH are the pleasing records of his domestic and moral life at Oxford. They present to us a perfect picture of his character, and the admirable qualities of his heart. We are told also, that it was with manifest pleasure, he received a letter from his mother or sisters, of whom he ever spoke with the tenderest affection.

Though Shelley was eminently serious in his habits and tastes, he appears also to have had a sly relish for a joke; particularly of a literary

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character, so long as it was purely chaste and harmless; while anything indelicate or unseemly aroused in him such indignation, as to surprise those acquainted with the native sweetness of his character.

To give an instance of his qualifications in this talent, it will be necessary to expose the dulness of those who were entrusted with the charge of improving and developing his mind.

Busily as he was employed with his scholastic duties, his chemical and metaphysical enquiries, he found time to devote to the more graceful art of poetry; and early during his collegiate life, projected the publication of a collection of short pieces.

On submitting the proof sheets of these to his friend Hogg, who, one morning, on paying his usual visit, found him totally absorbed in correcting and revising; he was much disconcerted at the disparaging manner in which he spoke of them. He listened attentively, and in silence to his friend's remarks, and only ventured faintly to suggest that it would not be known that he was the author, and therefore the publication could do him no harm; which

led his friend very wisely to reflect that "although it might not be disadvantageous to be the unknown author of an unread work, it certainly could not be beneficial." He made no reply, and the subject for the time was passed over.

In the evening, however, whilst they were at tea, Shelley suddenly remarked, "You seem to disparage my poems; tell me what you dislike in them, for I have forgotten."

The proofs were again examined, the objections pointed out, which he proposed to alter, when Hogg farther suggested, that the collection could only be published as burlesque poetry; and reading portions, he altered here and there a word or two, to give effect to this proposition, at which Shelley laughed, and begged he would read them again. Afterwards reading them himself, in a ridiculous tone, with the proposed alterations, he was so delighted, with the burlesque character they had taken, that he was fully consoled for the condemnation they had received.

They now set to work together, stimulated by this new idea, striking out the more serious

passages, and substituting whimsical conceits; cutting some lines in two, and joining the different parts together that would agree in construction, but were the most discordant in sense, to render them, as they termed it, dithyrambic.

When they had bestowed a sufficient amount of absurdity on the proofs, they suggested "divers ludicrous titles for the work; proposing to publish it under the name of one of the chief living poets, or some grave authority; regaling themselves with anticipations of his wrathful renunciations, and astonishment to find himself immortalized without his knowledge, and against his will."

A title was at last hit upon, to which pre-eminence was given, and they inscribed it upon the cover. A mad washerwoman, named Peg Nicholson, had attempted the life of George III., with a carving knife; the story was then fresh in the memory of every one—it was proposed to ascribe the poems to her. The poor woman was still living within the walls of Bedlam; but "since her existence must be uncomfortable, there could be no harm in putting her to death,

and in creating a nephew and administrator to be the editor of his aunt's poetical works."

When the bookseller called for the proofs, Shelley acquainted him with the change his ideas had taken, and the man was so much pleased with the whimsical conceit, that he asked permission to publish the book on his own account, promising inviolable secrecy, and as many copies *gratis*, as might be required. Permission was easily obtained, and the work put in hand with as little delay as possible.

In a few days, or rather a few hours, a noble quarto appeared; it consisted of a small number of pages, but they were of the largest size, of the thickest, the whitest, and the smoothest drawing paper. The poor maniac laundress was gravely styled, "The late Mrs. Margaret Nicholson, widow," and the sonorous name of Fitz-Victor had been chosen for her inconsolable nephew; to add to his dignity, the waggish printer had picked up some huge text types—of so unusual a form, that even an antiquary could not spell the words at a first glance. The effect was certainly striking; Shelley had torn open the large square bundle,

before the printer's devil had quitted the room, and holding out a copy with both hands, ran about in an ecstasy of delight and satisfaction, gazing at the superb title-page.

The first poem in the collection was Shelley's own composition, but had been adapted for the occasion. It is spoken of as poor "puling trash;" and its object to condemn war in the lump. The MS. had been confided to him by some rhymester, and was put forth in its present shape to astonish a weak mind. It contained sundry odes, and other pieces, professing an ardent attachment to freedom, and proposing to stab all who were less enthusiastic than the supposed authoress. These, with a panegyrice on Charlotte Corday, made up the collection. A few copies were sent to some trusty friends, and the remaining copies sold rapidly at Oxford, at the aristocratical price of half-a-crown for half-a-dozen pages.

Such is Mr. Hogg's relation of this hoax, who tells us:—

"They used to meet gownsmen in High Street, reading the goodly volume as they walked pensive with a grave and sage delight,

some of them, perhaps, more pensive because it seemed to portend the instant overthrow of all royalty, from a king to a court card.

"What a strange delusion," he says, "to admire our stuff; the concentrated essence of nonsense."

It was indeed, a kind of fashion to be seen reading it in public, as a mark of nice discernment; of a delicate and fastidious taste in poetry, and the very criterion of a choice spirit.

Without enquiring into the merits of the poems, which doubtless were indifferent enough, as they have not come down to us, it is sufficient to reflect upon the dulness of those who could read burlesque pieces, and mistake them for serious compositions. It does not impress us with a very exalted opinion of the intellect that illuminated the university, which a boy of eighteen could play so successful a hoax upon.

CHAPTER XIII.

Shelley's speculative Theories—College life—Youthful Associations — Disappointments — Merits—Eccentric Dialogue — Political discussions —Election of Lord Granville— Shelley unpopular—The capacity of his Teachers — His studious seclusion — Metaphysics— Poetry—Academical progress.

It will be remembered that while yet at Eton, he had already entered upon his career as a bold and fearless speculator, pushing his enquiries to the extreme of prudence, so far as regarded his own position, often baffling the ingenuity of his opponents, with his subtle propositions; and on one occasion provoking the unmanly threat of an angry and ignorant correspondent.

In investigating the nature of solids and fluids, the young philosopher had proceeded to reduce

the infinitely varied combinations of matter to a certain number of gases; and had thence so far refined upon his theory, as to reduce these again to the electric fluid; thus arriving, like Spinosa, upon the verge of the material universe—it was but a bound to the regions of the spiritual.

True, it was but a glimpse he had obtained of the great mystery; but it was such as could be presented only to a child of genius. He had lifted up the veil that hung over the face of truth, and the confused mass of splendid images that there pressed upon his sight aroused that vigorous faculty, which when once set into action can never again find rest.

On his entry at Oxford he was delighted at the prospect of being able to prosecute his studies with greater diligence, in the retreat and quietude of a college life.

An earnest student, cradled amidst classical associations, regards every edifice where learning is fostered and encouraged, with a peculiar reverence; it can present itself only to him, as clustered about with the ideal olive, and watched over by that tutelary goddess, to whom its peaceful shade is sacred. He loves truth for its own

sake; and desires liberty for the free discussion and exercise of his thoughts. He desires a guide to assist, or if not a prompting hand to impel or curb him in the too eager pursuit of his darling object; and has every right to expect that they whose sacred duty it is to guide his footsteps into the sanctuary of the temple of wisdom, will have cast aside as an unclean robe, unworthy of their position, all trivial things that dwarf men's minds, and cover the face of truth with a cloud.

If such were the visions Shelley entertained, they were destined soon to be dispelled, for very shortly after his arrival, in a conversation with his collegiate friend, after long musing, he remarked with a deep sigh:

"They are dull people here. A little man sent for me this morning, and told me in an almost inaudible whisper, that I must read.

"'You must read, you must read,' he said many times, in his small voice.

"I answered, I had no objection; he persisted; so, to satisfy him, for he did not appear to believe me, I told him I had some books in my pocket, and began to take them out.

"He stared at me and said, that was not exactly what he meant. 'You must read Prometheus Vinctus, and Demosthenes de Coronâ, and Euclid.'

'"Must I read Euclid?' I asked sorrowfully.

"'Yes, certainly; and when you have read the Greek works I have mentioned, you must begin Aristotle's Ethics; and then you may go on to his other treatises. It is of the utmost importance to be acquainted with Aristotle.'

"This he repeated so often that I was quite tired, and at last said:

"'Must I care about Aristotle? What if I do not mind Aristotle?'

"I then left, for he seemed to be in great perplexity."

In this short dialogue we may observe how the form rather than the spirit of learning was attended to, and at the same time may detect with Shelley, the dulness of the man proposed as his instructor. But there needed not this, for it was evident from the beginning that the venerable pile at whose feet murmur the waters of the silvery Isis, in no way resembled its great progenitor on the banks of the Ilyssus.

When he arrived at this stately temple, intended only as the dwelling of the Muses and of Philosophy, the quiet porticoes of learning and academic lore were invaded and desecrated by the rude strife and rancour of political prejudice and party spirit, arising out of the late election of its Chancellor, Lord Grenville, who had just been chosen, between whose scholarship and various qualifications for the honourable but useless office, and those of his unsuccessful opponent, there could be no comparison. But, unfortunately, the vanquished competitor was a member of the college to which Shelley belonged, and had been vehemently supported by its rulers, who looked forward to much church patronage in the event of his success; and, in proportion as they had raised their expectations, so was their anger at being foiled.

Himself a sincere lover of learning, it was likely that Shelley would rejoice at the result of the election; and thoroughly despising in his heart the meannesses and rancour of party prejudice, it was not improbable that he should feel disgusted at the impotent rage of dis-

appointed avarice which expended itself in daily bickerings and shallow lampoons, inflicting only a disgrace upon his college—nor, bold and fearless as was his character, can it be supposed that he took much pains to conceal his opinions.

Discreditable as these proceedings were, it was still more to be lamented that a temple of learning should be watched over by mean and sordid minds, whose aspirations were, not to be humble guides to the sanctuary of young enthusiasts, who desired to worship at the feet of the Muses, but to obtain the worldly advantages of fat benefices and snug sinecures, where a life might be droned out, between luxury and indolence, between hypocritical professions and the most shameless violations of the most sacred charges of their Divine teacher.

Such, however, was the case in the present instance; the heads of the college to which Shelley belonged had lost their hopes of preferment, by the accession of Lord Grenville to the Chancellorship; and "since the learned and the liberal had conquered, learning and liberality were peculiarly odious at this epoch. The

studious scholar, particularly if he were of an inquiring disposition, and of a bold and free temper, was suspected and disliked."*

Shelley, therefore, almost on his entrance into the college, became an object of suspicion, although it was manifest that he was a youth of admirable temper, of rare talents, and unwearied industry; and likely, therefore, to shed a lustre on the college, and the university itself. Yet, as he was eminently delighted at that wherewith his superiors were offended, he was regarded from the beginning with a jealous eye.

He often pathetically lamented these divisions, partaking, as they did, of a political and religious character; and it is said by his friend, that it inspired him with an intense antipathy for the political career that had already been proposed to him.

But, turning from the consideration of his political or moral creed, it is sufficient for the present to inquire into the manner in which he prosecuted his studies.

Little heeding the mean spite of sordid minds, he pursued the same unwearied course of study,

* New Monthly.

and bold inquiry, he had pursued at Eton. Indeed, these bickerings made him shut himself up the closer in the seclusion of his delightful study, that he might be out of the din of petty disputes. He read diligently, and every author that aroused his curiosity was greedily devoured. "He wrote, he began to print, and designed soon to publish various works. Among his readings were many that were ill-chosen—certain productions of Scotch metaphysicians of inferior ability, with some French works that treat of them, for the most part in a mixed method, metaphysically, morally, and politically."

He was a diligent reader also of "Hume's Essays," which strongly tainted him at this time with the sceptical philosophy, nor was he less delighted with "Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding," to examine a chapter of which he would at any moment quit every other pursuit.

But it must be borne in mind, that Plato was his great high priest, whose divine dialogues, especially the Phædo, occupied his attention night and day. Alternately swayed by such contending elements, it must be seen that his

notions could not but be confused and unsteady in their character.

A celebrated poet has well taught us that

> "There is more faith in honest doubt,
> Believe me, than in half the creeds."

And, if there could be any blame attached to the opposite and confused nature of his studies, it could be only to reflect disgrace upon the culpable neglect of the authorities, who were receiving enormous sums to direct and assist, to the best of their ability, in the proper development of his mind.

In the college, the only course adopted was one of chartered laziness; and its members might study or not, as they pleased. The lectures were poor and uninstructive; nor were the written exercises more stimulating than the oral.

"Certain compositions were required at stated periods; but, however excellent they might be, they were never commended; however deficient, they were never censured; and, being altogether unnoticed, there was no reason to suppose they were ever read." This system was ill-suited to

the character of Shelley; and, as those who were hired at an enormous charge by his own family and the state, thought fit to neglect this, their most sacred duty, he followed, as the only resource, his own wayward and unguided inclinations.*

He did not, as might be expected, neglect the usual college exercises, though they occupied but a small share of his attention. In his Latin compositions, he was fond of indulging in a dry vein of humour, by the frequent introduction of heroic verses, for the purpose, as he used slily to tell his friend, of trying the ears of his tutors, whose dulness, it may be supposed, often let them pass unobserved. Being detected once at Eton in this kind of sport, and appearing unconscious of their existence, a worthy master was induced at that college to apply to him a line from Ovid, in which he says of himself:

"Et quod tentabam dicere, versus erat."

For the cultivation of his poetical powers, he applied himself diligently to the mechanism of his art, and, while he studied the great living authors

* New Monthly.

as models of English composition, he improved his facility for writing Latin verses, an accomplishment he was fond of displaying; for he would open a volume at hazard of Livy or Sallust, and, by the rapid transposition of words, would change whole sentences from prose to heroic or elegiac verse.

This practice he neglected on quitting Oxford, perhaps designedly, says Hogg, as being suitable only to academic groves, or the banks of the Isis.

CHAPTER XIV.

Physics neglected—Metaphysics paramount—Epistolary disputation—The Necessity of Atheism—Its author vindicated — Disastrous consequences — Expulsion—Intercession of his friend—Cruel injustice—Close of Oxford career.

SHELLEY'S chemical operations soon fell into neglect, for want of encouragement, and the slight that his companion in study persisted in throwing upon them, and were soon altogether abandoned for the higher walks of metaphysics, which, while they offered food for the subtle faculties of his mind, as well as an extensive field for his vivid imagination, presented the additional charm of endless topics for discussion.

He read greedily all the works that have

already been named, and having so far armed himself, entered into vehement disputes with his friends.

The practice of epistolary disputation, under an assumed name, commenced at Eton, was also adopted, and very much extended at Oxford, which made the postman with him a very important personage.

That this practice was carried on with considerable ability, is evident from the fact that he succeeded in confuting men who numbered thrice his years; but the greater to facilitate this part of his system, having, in conjunction with his collegiate friend, made a careful analysis of "Hume's Essays," as was customary with those who read for their Degrees, he selected facts from the various papers, and printed them in the form of a pamphlet, believing that something in a printed form was more likely to provoke rejoinder, than written arguments from an unknown correspondent.

This he used to enclose, and forward by post, stating with modesty and simplicity, that he had met accidentally with that little tract, which appeared unhappily to be quite unanswerable.

Whether this was entitled "The Necessity of Atheism" or not, does not appear to me quite certain, though I am of opinion it was, but it was never offered for sale, nor was it addressed to the general reader, but only to the metaphysicians, and its brevity was such as only to point out the line of argument.

Speaking of this unfortunate pamphlet, his friend says, "It was in truth a general issue, a compendious denial of every allegation, in order to put the whole case in proof; it was a formal mode of saying, 'you affirm so and so, then prove it;' and thus was it understood by his more candid and intelligent correspondents. As it was shorter, so was it plainer, and, perhaps in order to provoke discussion, a little bolder than 'Hume's Essays,' a book which occupies a conspicuous place in the library of every student.

"The doctrine, if it deserve the name was precisely similar, the necessary and inevitable consequence of Locke's philosophy, and of the theory that all knowledge is from without. I will not admit your conclusions, his opponent might answer; then you must deny those of

Hume; I deny them; but you must deny those of Locke also; and we will go back together to Plato.

"The young Platonist argued thus negatively, through the love of argument, and because he found a noble joy in the fierce shock of contending minds; he loved truth, and sought it everywhere, and at all hazards, frankly and boldly like a man who deserved to find it."

In these investigations, he did not disdain the minute points, and dry details of the science, often following the most trivial stream, through all its intricate meanderings, with remarkable tenacity, to its final source; and it has been considered not a little singular, that a man otherwise indulging in the wildest and loftiest flights of imagination, accepting implicitly the creation of the poet's brain, should yet be so sceptical in matters of faith, that he would not accept the simplest proposition, without strict logical demonstration.

The best solution to this, is the simple fact that he loved truth with a martyr's love, and denied every proposition; fighting thereby, to a manifest disadvantage, for the sake of eliciting

the best arguments in its favour. Naturally gentle and tractable by kindness, he had no disposition whatever to quarrel with received opinions and forms, but simply desired to weigh them properly in the balance of his own mind.

It must be confessed, however, that he was often startled, by the manner in which he saw the present teachings sullied and falsified by the strange modifications suggested or adopted, according to the dictates of convenience or interest.

This led him sometimes to doubt the sincerity of the teachers; nor did the effect of such a system appear to be happy. The interest of the few was too frequently considered, to the detriment of the many. Liberty and Love, the all-absorbing passions of his heart, were tampered and trifled with; oppression and hatred too often advanced in solemn mockery, as their semblance; and the standard of falsehood was raised in glittering panoply in the cause of truth.

His teachers, described as the vulgar sons of vulgar fathers, without liberality, and wanting the manners and sympathies of gentlemen, en-

couraging, by their neglect and indifference, all kinds of irregularities, licentiousness, and drunkenness, in the College. Men, who might be said to have forsaken the true worship for the false gods, as well as the flesh-pots of Egypt, could inspire him with no reverence.

Moreover, he was a true idealist, impressed with deep, religious fervour; with the faculty of veneration, strongly developed, loving better to throw himself back into the past, and in the gardens of Academus to contemplate the sublime vision of God and eternal Beatitude, through the medium of his Divine Teacher, than to accept, without question, the dogmas before which ignorance and superstition might tremble, or which bigotry too frequently seemed determined to enforce; and here it will be seen, on due reflection, that it was the very fact of his being so grasping in his spiritual aspirations, that his imagination refused to clog her wing with the flimsy conceits of school-men, or the mere conventionalisms of society, when they represented the Infinite in any way less than the grandeur of his own conceptions.

We have now to see how a mind so richly,

yet so peculiarly endowed, was appreciated by his superiors.

His little pamphlet shortly fell into their hands, and it was impossible they should understand it, for it was concerning the nature of God, and the questions started, as subtle in their nature as those of Cyprian in the "Majico Prodigioso" of Calderon.* They had no intellect to reply to his interrogations, nor did they attempt it, as in common honesty they might have done, and had nothing to offer, but the malignity of their own minds.

But while, by their incapacity, they thus convicted themselves of misprision Atheism, they left their pupil, whom they were paid to guide and assist, in the terrible dilemma of believing his pamphlet unanswerable.

It is said that this circumstance was aggravated by the meddling interference of a tutor of the College of inferior note, who hoping to profit by the transaction, and well knowing the jealous and unfriendly eye with which Shelley was re-

* The same passage in Pliny, which Calderon makes Cyprian meditate upon, is that which first aroused the spirit of enquiry and earnest investigation in Shelley.

garded, secretly denounced him to his superiors.

It is farther stated, that after this affair, this wretched creature was rapidly enriched with the most splendid benefices, and finally became a dignitary of the Church; but the sequel is best told in the words of his friend.

They had gone on prosecuting their studies with the same bold, earnest and eager enthusiasm; and as the term was drawing to a close, and a great part of the books they were reading together still remained unfinished, they had agreed to increase their exertions, and to meet at an earlier hour. He says:

"It was a fine spring morning, on Lady-day, in the year 1811, when I went to Shelley's rooms. He was absent, but before I had collected our books he rushed in. He was terribly agitated. I anxiously inquired what had happened?

"'I am expelled,' he said, as soon as he had recovered himself a little. 'I am expelled. I was sent for suddenly a few minutes ago: I went to the common room, where I found our master, and two or three of the fellows.

"'The master furnished a copy of the little syllabus, and asked me if I were the author of it. He spoke in a rude, abrupt, and insolent tone. I begged to be informed for what purpose they put the question.

"'No answer was given; but the master loudly and angrily repeated "Are you the author of this book?"

"'If I can judge from your manner,' I said, 'you are resolved to punish me if I should acknowledge that it is my work. If you can prove that it is, produce your evidence; it is neither just nor lawful to interrogate me in such a case, and for such a purpose. Such proceedings would become a court of Inquisitors, but not free men in a free country.'

"'Do you choose to deny that this is your composition?' reiterated the master, in the same rude and angry voice.

"Shelley complained of his violent and ungentlemanlike deportment, saying:

"'I have experienced tyranny and injustice before, and well know what vulgar violence is; but I never met with such unworthy treatment. I told him calmly but firmly that I was deter-

mined not to answer any questions respecting the publication on the table. He immediately repeated his demand. I persisted in my refusal; and he said furiously:

"'Then you are expelled, and I desire you will quit the college early to-morrow morning.' At the conclusion one of the fellows took up two papers and handed one of them to me. Here it is.' He produced a regular sentence of expulsion, drawn up in due form, under the seal of the college.

"Shelley was full of spirit and courage, frank and fearless; but he was likewise shy, unpresuming, and eminently sensitive. I have been with him in many trying situations of his after-life, but I never saw him so deeply shocked, and so cruelly agitated, as on this occasion.

"He sat on the sofa, repeating with convulsive vehemence, the words, 'expelled, expelled, expelled;' his hand shaking with emotion, and his whole frame quivering."

In this we see that inherent delicacy of his mind, no less than in the happiest moments of his life. However much he might despise the

mean spite of those whom an evil fortune had placed over him, he shrunk instinctively from the disgrace which their gross tyranny, by this flagrant act of injustice, would inflict upon him.

His friend, in this painful conclusion to their honourable and delightful study, did not hesitate to stand by him, and brave the rude anger of those men, who placed in a little brief authority, could only employ it in the exercise of the insolence of office, "so monstrous, and so illegal," he says, "did it seem that he held it to be impossible that any man, or any body, could dare to adhere to it."

He wrote a short note to the master and fellows, in which he briefly expressed his sorrow at the treatment his friend had experienced, and his hope that they would reconsider their sentence, since, as he justly observes, by the same course of proceeding, himself or any other person might be subjected to the same penalty, and to the imputation of equal guilt.

The note was dispatched, the conclave was still sitting, and in an instant the porter came to summon the unfortunate writer to attend, bear-

ing in his countenance a promise of the reception he was about to find.

"The angry and troubled air of men," says Mr. Hogg, "assembled to commit injustice, was then new to me; but a native instinct told me, as soon as I entered the room, that it was an affair of party, that whatever could conciliate the favour of the patrons, was to be done without scruple; and whatever could tend to impede preferment, was to be pushed away without remorse."

The note was produced, and acknowledged by the writer. The little syllabus was then abruptly held forward by the angry and glowing master.

"Did you write this?" he demanded, fiercely.

"I attempted," says Hogg, "submissively to point out to him the extreme unfairness of the question, the injustice of punishing Shelley for refusing to answer; that if it were urged upon me I must offer the like refusal, which I had no doubt every man in college would, every gentleman indeed in the University; which, if such a course were adopted with all, and there could not be any reason why it should be used with one

and not with the rest, would thus be stripped of every member.

"I soon perceived that arguments were thown away upon a man possessing no more intellect or ambition, far less renown, than that famous ram, since translated to the stars, through grasping whose tail less firmly than was expedient, the sister of Phryxus formerly found a watery grave, and gave her name to the broad Hellespont.

"The other persons present took no part in the conversation. They presumed not to speak, scarcely to breathe, but looked utter subserviency. The few resident fellows, indeed, were but so many incarnations of the spirit of the master, whatever that spirit might be.

"When I was silent, the master told me to retire, and consider whether I was resolved to persist in my refusal. I had scarcely passed the door, however, when I was recalled.

"The master again showed me the book, and hastily demanded whether I admitted or denied that I was the author of it.

"I answered that I was fully sensible of the many, and great inconveniences of being dismissed with disgrace from the University; and

expressed a humble hope that they would not impose such a mark of discredit on me without any cause.

"I lamented it was impossible, either to admit or to deny the publication, no man of spirit could submit to do so; and that a sense of duty compelled me, respectfully, to refuse to answer the question that had been proposed.

"'Then you are expelled,' said the master, angrily, in a loud voice. A formal sentence, duly signed and sealed, was instantly put into my hand; in what interval it had been drawn up, I cannot imagine.

"The alleged offence was a contumacious refusal to disavow the imputed publication. My eye glanced over it, and observing the word *contumaciously*, I said, calmly, that I did not think that term was justified by my behaviour. Before I had concluded the remark, the master, lifting up the little syllabus, and then dashing it on the table, and looking sternly at me, said—

"'Am I to understand, sir, that you adopt the principles contained in this work?' or some such words, for like one red with the suffusion of college port and college ale, the intense heat

of anger seemed to deprive him of the power of articulation, by reason of a rude provincial dialect and thickness of utterance—his speech being at all times indistinct.

" 'The last question is still more improper than the former,' I replied, for I felt that the imputation was an insult; 'and since, by your own act, you have renounced all authority over me, our communication is at an end.'

" 'I command you to quit my college to-morrow, at an early hour.'

" I bowed and withdrew. I thank God, I have never seen that man since; he is gone to his bed, and there let him sleep. Whilst he lived, he ate freely of the scholar's bread, and drank from his cup; and he was sustained throughout the whole term of his existence by those sacred funds that were consecrated by our pious forefathers, to the advancement of learning." *

* New Monthly.

CHAPTER XV.

Shelley's creed considered—Its imaginative beauty—Culpability of his tutors—Departure from Oxford—Harriette Grove—Shelley's first love—Vision of female perfection—Joint literary labours—Successful courtship—Abrupt termination—Effect of his expulsion—Anger and harshness of his father—his mother—Shelley an outcast—His Oxford treatment considered—Shelley and Byron compared—Youthful enthusiasm—Arrival in London.

THUS were the future prospects of Shelley's life blasted. He had set about, with deep religious enthusiasm, to discover for himself the one supreme God, firmly believing in the truth of his existence, but unable to reconcile his attributes of infinite perfection, with the received notions and principles adopted in the world.

In interrogating nature, as he stood with

her, spirit with spirit, she seemed every where to point to the eternal laws, which in their perpetual progress of good, produced the harmony of the spheres, and in contemplating the wonders of creation from the atoms of the earth, to the rolling orbs of heaven, he witnessed the infinitely varied chain, which made up the glorious fabric of the universe; and the splendid vision that at once dazzled and oppressed him, of the divine Architect, was that of an all-pervading spirit of love, whose bright presence interpenetrates and surrounds all existence, as with a halo of glory, declaring itself at the same time both the body and the soul of nature.

It was a glorions vision which represented God as the invisible essence of which the universe was but the sign, the outward garment with which he clothed himself, but one which to trace out in all its ramifications, might well weigh down an older and more experienced head than his.

He discovered the grasp of his intellect, in so grand a conception, and the spirituality of his own nature, in soaring thus above all material

existence, to contemplate the Supreme God in his ideal perfection, but it was yet vague and unsatisfactory, requiring long and patient study to define and make more palpable.

He was young, and not without the impetuosity of youth, but the pantheism upon which he had fallen was by no means new, nor in the doctrine of the omnipresence of the Deity, was the idea of the universal spirit of love altogether foreign to the religious polity, offered for his acceptance by his superiors; and surely if, in pointing out certain inconsistences in things offered to him as divine revelations of truth, a youth of but eighteen years was sometimes inconsistent himself, faith, hope, or charity, or at least the collective wisdom of his teachers, might have found some means to correct him of his error or folly, or illogical deductions, consistent with their dignity, with justice, with common sense, or common honesty, better than to cast him forth with the opprobrium of expulsion, and the brand of atheism, attached to his name.

Such, however, was the fact; the pure atmosphere of University College could no longer be

polluted by the presence of so monstrous an offender against its sanctity; whose crime was, that he had become intoxicated by the contemplation of the ideal perfections of the Deity, and the fitting punishment, devised by its guardian saints, was to cast him forth, a reprobate from her undefiled bosom.

Early the next morning, Shelley, with his friend and fellow-sufferer, set out for London, on the top of the coach, turning their backs for ever upon Oxford. The narration of the injurious effects of this cruel, precipitate, unjust, and illegal expulsion upon the entire course of his subsequent life, will not be wanting in interest or instruction —of a period when the scene was changed, from the quiet seclusion of academic groves and gardens, and the calm valley of the silvery Isis, to the stormy ocean of that vast and shoreless world, to the utmost violence of which he was at this early age suddenly and unnaturally abandoned.*

One of the immediate effects of Shelley's expulsion from Oxford was the dissipation of his first dream of love.

* New Monthly.

In the summer of the year of his arrival at Oxford, he first saw his cousin, Harriette Grove. Living in distant counties, they had never before met, but this lady was now on a visit at Castle Goring. She was the same age as Shelley, and bore a strong resemblance to him—a circumstance to which he seems to allude in a beautiful fragment written many years later, wherein he says—

"They were two cousins, almost like to twins,
And so they grew together like two flowers,
Upon one stem, which the same beams and showers
Lull or awaken in their purple prime."

For her varied attractions we must be content to follow Medwin, who recalls her image, after an absence of twenty-five years, as some bright creation from the pen of Shakspeare or the magic pencil of Raphael: that this early passion was deep and earnest, at least on the side of the poet, we may readily believe.

In the dedication of Queen Mab, he speaks of her as the inspiration of his song; and declares that, beneath her look his reviving soul has riper in truth and virtuous daring grown; and that the fondly gazing upon her face had

made him love mankind the more. Nor, remembering the indelible love throned in the heart of Dante, at the age of ten, for his Beatrice, that of Byron for the beautiful heiress of Annesley at fifteen, is it difficult to understand that the romantic nature of Shelley should be deeply enthralled, at the age of seventeen, by one who is described as possessing the rarest charms of womanhood.

The hues of poetry in which he clothed the object of his passion are no doubt fairly stated in the Epiphychidion, where he says:—

"There was a being whom my spirit oft
Met on its visioned wanderings, far aloft,
In the clear golden prime of my youth's dawn,
Upon the fairy isles of sunny lawn,
Amid the enchanted mountains, and the caves
Of divine sleep, and on the air-like waves
Of wonder-level dream, whose tremulous floor
Paved her light step—on an imagined shore,
Under the grey beak of some promontory
She met me robed in such exceeding glory,
That I beheld her not. In solitudes
Her voice came to me through the whispering woods;
And from the fountains and the odours deep
Of flowers, which, like lips murmuring in their sleep
Of the sweet kisses that had lulled them there,
Breathed but of her to the enamoured air;

And from the breezes whether low or loud,
And from the rain of every passing cloud,
And from the singing of the summer-birds,
And from all sounds, all silence, in the words
Of antique verse and high romance—in form,
Sound, colour, in whatever checks the storm,
Which with the shattered present chokes the past;
And in that best philosophy, whose taste
Makes this cold common hell, our life, a doom
As glorious as a fiery martyrdom,
Her spirit was the harmony of truth."

Such, we may take to be the splendid vision which, more or less, and, at some time or another, in his spiritual aspirations, kindles the heart of the poet, and to which, perhaps, may be referred many of the errors of his after-life: nor can Shelley in any way be considered an exception from the rule.

The close and uninterrupted intercourse of the young lovers during the long summer recess, their joint literary labours, their similarity of tastes, were in every way calculated to foster a passion commenced under the most favourable auspices, nor can it be supposed that, at length, when he arrived at Oxford, the correspondence of the young idealist was strictly confined to metaphysical disquisitions, but the first blow

that was struck at him, on his expulsion, was the prohibition to hold any further communication with her.

Whether the lady was altogether blameless in this transaction, it would be painful, and perhaps useless to inquire. I hope she was; but certain it is that not many weeks after, he was informed, that her he adored was wedded to another.

That Shelley was deeply affected by this circumstance is shewn by a fragment, where his wild and untameable thoughts found utterance. It is the most melancholy of its kind:

> ' Her voice did quiver as we parted,
> Yet knew I not that heart was broken
> From which it came, and I departed,
> Heeding not the words then spoken.
> Misery, oh misery,
> This world is all, too wide for thee."

For a long time the remembrance of this early attachment was the canker of his existence; even if the love which had attained so ideal an eminence was ever wholly erased from his heart.

He might have found solace, however, for this misfortune in the bosom of his sisters, and

the comforts of home; but on receiving the intelligence of his expulsion, his father grew furious with disappointed ambition; for, proud of the talents of his son, Sir Timothy had looked forward for academical honours as a means of worldly advancement in the splendid political career he had sketched out for him. It had been his intention, when Percy attained his majority, to resign his seat in Parliament in his favour; and now with stern severity, he refused to accept him under his roof.

From the painful silence respecting his mother, it does not appear that she did anything to palliate the offence of her son, or to soften the anger of his father. His companion in misfortune was not doomed to a milder fate, for the fathers of both, like the old men in Terence, compared notes, and hardened each other's hearts.*

Both were turned adrift upon the world to hew out their fortunes as best they could, nor does it appear that the father of either ever relented. One carried his animosity to the grave, the other survived his son, and lived long

* Medwin's Life of Shelley.

enough to be aware of the laurels he had gained without his assistance.

Had the authorities treated Shelley's speculations with indifference, regarding them as men of large intellects, and liberal education, should have done in the light of intellectual exercise, proper for the full developement of dormant faculties, and the natural probation through which every great and original thinker passes; had they earnestly set about doing their duty, by opening the fountains of learning at their command, upon a thirsting and famished soul; and by guiding the faltering and uneasy steps of an aspiring youth, who loved truth, and longed to worship at the feet of wisdom; had they by example, as well as precept, commanded the esteem of a childlike and affectionate heart, a youth spoken of as possessing the delicacy, as well as the modesty of a maiden; and lastly, had liberality, and not coercion been their rule of action, Shelley would have been left to fulfil his collegiate career, and would have outgrown the first impetuosity of youth and all that feverish excitement attendant upon its supposed great discoveries; his wild theories in physics would have found their

proper level, and marrying the object of his youthful passion, he would probably have gratified his father's ambition, by succeeding him in his seat in Parliament.

There, undoubtedly, he would have boldly declared his independent opinions, both for political and religious reform; but whether he possessed the fitting qualities to become a great statesman is more than doubtful. It is most probable he would have created much sensation in his day; and farther, have gained some applause as an indifferent poet.

Succeeding ultimately to the rich estates he was heir to, he would probably have received the blessing of the poor in his neighbourhood, for an active and unwearying benevolence; and surrounded by sons and daughters, might at length have gone down to a quiet grave, amidst the tears and benedictions of thousands, who had shared his bounty, and beloved by all who knew him.

But it was not so ordained, the stern and haggard visage of the genius of poverty, of persecution and wrong, hung over him instead; and he was driven forth with only half the curse of

Ishmael on his head. "His hand for every man, and every man's hand against him."

> "Most wretched men
> Are cradled into poetry by wrong;
> They learn in suffering, what they teach in song."

Whether or not the world is a loser by this, the sequel has shown. It has lost an indifferent statesman, but gained a great poet; and when the herd of every-day politicians is forgotten, his memory will still be cherished by posterity.

Comparisons are at all times invidious; but early disappointment, the one pang among many in the present instance, is said to have cradled another great mind into poetry; but it is not a little singular to observe how differently minds are constituted, in comparing the results upon two men like Shelley and the noble author of Childe Harold.

Lord Byron's unhappy passion for Mary Chaworth, lent a colouring to all the thoughts and actions of his life; her image was ever present to him, and, as he related, often rose up with reproachful looks, as in vision, to rebuke him in the midst of his excesses.

In the first agony of disappointed love, he allowed his mind to be overclouded with morbid misanthropy, making mankind answerable for his own rejected suit. He took a strange delight in regarding himself as a wronged and injured being, exaggerating his own despair, till with the haughty pride of a fallen archangel, he affected to look upon the world with contempt, as though the world were his enemy, and not himself; he mistook the brooding of his own native melancholy for depth of sorrow, and a querulous dissatisfaction with the world, for a noble disdain.

He sought by dissipation and the excitement of society to dispel his thoughts, and the friends and admirers who stood round him, affected to believe that this was the natural channel into which a highly-gifted, and highly sensitive mind would be cast, as the proper means of destroying the sorrow that was gnawing at his heart.

On the other hand, Shelley, with the true goodness of a noble nature, but with far greater provocation, determined to bear his misfortunes with becoming fortitude; conscious of having done nothing to justify the treatment he re-

ceived, he regarded himself as a martyr to the cause of truth, which he had dared boldly to inquire after; and with this conviction, felt much of the pride of martyrdom in the wrongs he suffered.

He sought relief for his individual sorrow, by extending his sympathies to his race. He looked out upon the world with an enlarged philosophy; and in the miseries of the down-trodden hearts he saw around him, half forgot the sufferings of his own. To befriend the poor and needy, in everything to ameliorate the condition of the helpless or the oppressed, became his solace.

To break down the flimsy conventionalisms of society, by exposing the smooth hypocrisies, the varnished falsehoods, the garbled truths, as well as all the ills that wait on them, in the most sacred name of virtue; but above all things, to establish liberty on a firmer basis, and tear off the shackles that enslave the mind.

To carry out these enlarged views for the advancement of his race, he was prepared to brave all obloquy, all danger, to give up all worldly considerations, whether of friends or fortune, and

even to devote himself, if need be, a willing sacrifice. But to proceed:

"I remember as if it occurred yesterday," says Medwin, "his knocking at my door in the Temple, at four o'clock in the morning, the second day after his expulsion. I think I hear his cracked voice with his well-known pipe.

"'Medwin, let me in, I am expelled, (here followed a loud hysterical laugh;) I am expelled for Atheism.'"

The young outcast, together with his friend and fellow sufferer, on arriving in London, took a lodging, and lived as best he could on the means at his disposal.

CHAPTER XVI.

Shelley's forlorn condition—His desire to do good—Disinterestedness of character—Anecdote of his generosity—A pawnbroker's shop—Seeks the acquaintance of Leigh Hunt—Letter addressed to him from Oxford—Shelley's ambition to proclaim reform—Proposal to Rowland Hill — Character of Rowland Hill — De Quincey—Shelley's egotism pardonable.

CAST thus rudely upon the world, when he had no better knowledge of its usages than the treatment he had received, without friends, without home, abandoned by his natural protectors as if he were an abortion, at an age when he needed most their guidance and affection; with his first dream of love cruelly destroyed, and a stigma attached to his name; it is not difficult to imagine with what feelings a being so delicately organized, first sat down in the heart of

this great metropolis, to mark out his own career and to pursue it as best he could.

Dazzled by his own interpretation of the divine nature of God, making the universe a presence-chamber for the great spirit of love, and burning under a keen sense of injustice, he began to form visions of happiness, and golden schemes for human perfectibility.

"The usual motives that rule men," says Mrs. Shelley, "prospects of present or future advantages, the rank and fortune of those around, the taunts, censures, or praises of those who were hostile to him—had no influence whatever over his actions, and apparently none over his thoughts."*

However acceptable the brave, bold manner with which he was eager to pursue, and ready to utter his opinions, might be to the Muses and Philosophy, he had yet to learn that the world, which mostly proves but a harsh step-dame to the children of genius, required wooing of a different stamp.

The following anecdote will serve to illustrate

* Note to Queen Mab.

the charitable tendencies of Shelley's mind at this period.

An old man related to him a tale of distress, which could only be alleviated by the timely application of ten pounds. Five was all the poet possessed. These he drew from his pocket and gave to the venerable petitioner; and to raise the other five, he pawned his beautiful solar microscope.

This circumstance would never have been known to the world, but through the impatience of a friend, who was, on a future occasion, returning with Shelley from a long ramble in the neighbourhood of Highgate, from whence they were to take tea together at an hotel in Covent Garden. Turning from their right course, they beguiled the weary way by a discussion on Roman virtue.

Whilst thus engaged, Shelley suddenly wheeled round, and pushed into a narrow, open doorway; to the surprise of his friend, they found themselves in a low pawnbroker's shop in Newgate Street, where some women were engaged in pointing out the beauties of certain coarse, dirty

sheets, to a man on the opposite side of the counter.

"I bore this substitute," says his friend, "for our proposed tea, for some moments, with tolerable patience, but as Shelley's business did not seem to terminate very speedily, I whispered to him, "'This is almost as bad as the Roman virtue.'"

The object of this visit was to redeem his pledge, the conclusion of which anecdote is thus pleasingly related by Mr. Hogg.

"It was past ten when we reached the hotel. Some excellent tea and hot muffins in the coffee-room, now quiet and solitary, were the more grateful, after the wearisome delay. Shelley appeared uneasy whenever the waiter approached, and he interrogated him as to whether any one had yet called. At last the desired summons was brought: he drew forth some bank notes, hurried to the bar, and presently returned, bearing in triumph under his arm a mahogany box, followed by the officious waiter, with whose assistance he placed it on the bench by his side.

"This solar microscope was with him always

a favorite plaything, or instrument of scientific inquiry. Whenever he entered a new house, his care was to choose some window of a southern aspect, and if permission could be obtained, by prayer or purchase, he would straightway cut a hole through the shutter, to receive it.

Being now in London, he took an early opportunity of calling on Leigh Hunt, and subsequently paid him a few short visits, which, however, did not then create much intimacy. The poet had already made himself known to this gentleman, having addressed to him the following letter from Oxford. Already it may have been observed, he interested himself in politics, among his other multitudinous studies:

"University College, Oxford,
March 2, 1811.

"SIR,

"Permit me, although a stranger, to offer my sincerest congratulations, on the occasion of that triumph, so highly to be prized by men of liberality. Permit me also to submit to your consideration, as one of the most fearless enlighteners of the public mind, a scheme of mutual safety and mutual indemnification for

men of public spirit and principle, which, if carried into effect, would evidently be productive of incalculable advantages. Of the scheme, the enclosed is an address to the public and the proposal for a meeting, and shall be modified according to your judgment, if you will do me the honour to consider the point. The ultimate intention of my aim is to induce a meeting of such enlightened, unprejudiced members of the community, whose independent principles expose them to evils, which might thus become alleviated—and to form a methodical society, which should be organised so as to resist the coalition of the enemies of liberty, which, at present, renders any expression of opinion on matters of policy, dangerous to individuals. It has been for the want of societies of this nature, that corruption has attained the height at which we behold it, nor can any of us bear in mind the very great influence which some years ago was gained by illuminism, without considering that a society, of equal extent, might establish rational liberty on as firm a basis as that, which would have supported the visionary schemes of a completely equalised community.

"Although perfectly unacquainted with you privately, I address you as a common friend to liberty, thinking that in cases of this urgency and importance, etiquette ought not to stand in the way of usefulness. My father is in parliament; and on attaining the age of twenty-one, I shall, in all probability, fill his vacant seat. On account of the responsibility to which my residence in this university subjects me, I, of course, cannot publicly avow all that I think, but the time will come when my every endeavour, insufficient as they may be, will be directed to the advancement of liberty.

"Your most obedient servant,

"P. B. SHELLEY." *

Our poet is described by Leigh Hunt, at that period, as "a youth, not yet come to his full growth, very gentlemanly, earnestly gazing at every object that interested him, and quoting the Greek dramatists."

His restless ambition to proclaim reform soon exhibited itself; for, going one Sunday to Surrey Chapel, to hear Rowland Hill, he wrote

* Westminster Review, vol. xxxv.

to him afterwards, under an assumed name, proposing to preach to his congregation; an act which, though certainly not quite justifiable, was equally undeserving of the bitter animadversion it called forth from De Quincy.

Had Shelley known that worthy man better than was possible from one visit to his chapel; had he known the struggles and self-denials of his life, the privations and indignities he had sustained; had he indeed been aware that the conscientious preacher of Christ's word had renounced the advantages of his birth, and suffered, like himself, persecution at home as abroad, in order to pursue a course which he believed to be for the welfare of his species; opposite as his principles appeared to his own, our poet would doubtless have approached him with more of reverence.

Let then a total ignorance of the character of Rowland Hill, as well as of the customary nature of his preaching, plead in extenuation of this trifling offence against the dignity of his calling. It is as well perhaps to add that the worthy Christian did not reply to Shelley's letter, and probably thought no more of it.

CHAPTER XVII.

Shelley's predilection for the water—Ducks and drakes—Paper boats—A rash adventure—Godwin's "Political Justice"—Its effect upon the poet's mind—Seeks the acquaintance of the author—Becomes a reader at the British Museum—Nature and variety of his studies—Eccentric habits of study—Close application—His abstract theories.

NOTWITHSTANDING the anxiety and care entailed on him at this early age, Shelley retained all that worship for the water-nymphs remarked at Oxford; for, taking frequent walks with his cousin along the banks of the Serpentine, he would stop to make "ducks and drakes," counting the bounds of some smooth stone, as it skimmed the surface of the water, or floating his paper boats, with much glee.

His collegiate friend relates an anecdote con-

nected with this singular sport, as follows: "Shelley once found himself on the north bank of the Serpentine, without the materials for indulging in those inclinations with which the sight of water invariably inspired him, having exhausted his supplies on the round pond, in Kensington Gardens.

"Not a single scrap of paper could he find, save only a bank post bill for fifty pounds. He hesitated long, but yielded at last. He twisted it into a boat, with the extreme refinement of his skill, and committed it, with the utmost dexterity, to fortune, watching its progress with intense anxiety. Fortune often favours those who frankly and fully trust her. The north-east wind gently wafted the costly skiff to the south bank, where, during the latter part of the voyage, the venturous owner had waited its arrival with patient solicitude."

The great object of his life was still study; though how the unworthy treatment he had received served to disturb his notions of things will presently be seen. He now met with Godwin's "Political Justice," and seemed to breathe for the first time in an open and bright atmosphere.

He furthermore resolved to square all his actions by what he conceived to be the strictest justice, without any consideration for those whose small exercise of that virtue towards himself ill-fitted them, he thought, and as ill-warranted him, to defer to the opinions of the world, whom they guided.*

I shall not, however, make it a part of my consideration to discuss at any length the moral or political sentiments of William Godwin, although they exercised much influence over the mind of Shelley.

That he was a man of strong, masculine intellect, comprehensive views, and great acuteness, must be evident to all who have enjoyed a perusal of his works; while the several editions of the above-mentioned production, soon after its appearance, sufficiently attest the manner in which he was appreciated in his day.

He, like Shelley, was a nonconformist from the beginning, but rendered more so, perhaps, by birth and education, and, always unconventional in his notions, his theories sometimes were of the most startling character; but the

* Leigh Hunt.

simplicity of his habits, and the ready willingness with which he practised his own precepts, left no doubt of his sincerity; and, above all, the deep religious faith he held in man's perfectability, gave such force and dignity to his style, such vigour to his thoughts, that he appeared ever the advocate of a just cause, bearing his readers delightfully onward, through new and strange regions of speculation, rendered by his genius clear and transparent as the glassy surface of a lake.

It is true, his advocacy of an intellectual republic, wherein all self-interest or consideration was to be forgotten, and only to be dealt with as it affected the general good, if attempted, would completely overturn the existing order of society, but he advocated no sudden change, and foresaw all the evils that would arise from it, and when we have said so much, the moral beauty of his sentiments remains unimpaired; and could all his readers, even in his day, have advocated his doctrines in the same spirit in which they were advanced, doubtless the effect of such an attempt had been a blessing to his race, instead of one fraught with all kinds of license and excess, as it otherwise as undoubtedly would have been.

The theory of freedom, not in its gross, vulgar sense, which results in confusion and anarchy, but in the large, intellectual sense of a noble mind, ever had been dear to Shelley: and the harsh school in which he had learned to despise the received notions and principles of society, well fitted him to receive a new system, which in every respect enlisted his sympathies and warmest admiration.

It cannot be considered too much to say, that to the generous, the brave, and the good, the glorious vision of liberty ever presents itself the holiest among the things of Heaven. As it was among the cities of Hellas, as it was on the banks of the Tiber, so has it ever been, and so will it continue to be among the enlightened of all ages; and as it shone forth the brightest, the purest in the infancy of those classic lands, so with the human mind has it ever declared itself more peculiarly the Aurora light of youth.

That Shelley was a remarkable illustration of this truth, every circumstance of his life, as yet related, has proved; and here it must be remembered that throughout his youth, the reaction of the French Revolution, the tragic dramas which

followed that great crisis, the tyranny and despotism, had created sympathies which insinuated themselves into the whole framework of society.

As his infancy expanded, the cry of liberty, which rang through Europe, had inspired him to the utmost. As he advanced, the hatred of oppression advanced with the march of circumstances, and the aspirations of poets, his contemporaries, the odes and songs poured forth from the muse of Wordsworth, of Coleridge, of Southey, may be said to have fostered the passion of his soul, until attaining its poetical eminence, it became, not an abstract principle, not simply a question of state policy, not the dry result only of a logical inquiry into the rights of humanity, but some bright divinity, gathered about with the orient beams of morn, and circled with the rainbow light of hope, whose name possessed such talismanic power, that could the world be brought to hymn it forth, so long as it was with pure lips and upright hearts, the strong bulwarks of tyranny and oppression would at once fall down, like the walls of Jericho at the third sounding of the trump, and as a natural consequence, all happiness, all blessings, every-

thing that the virtuous heart could desire in life, would arise Phœnix-like from their ashes. Such was the attractive theory he advocated at Oxford, where there was no lack of beardless politicians to share his enthusiasm, for the revolutionary spirit of that period was peculiarly calculated to inspire sentiments of heroism in the bosoms of an assembly of youths, and a Brutus or a Gracchus would have found many to sympathise, and few to fail, in theoretical devotion to the interests of equal freedom.*

But there was much want of definition in these heroic sentiments of a heart and soul, vivid with the richest glare of poetic imagery, and the highest aspirations for the good of his species, which seemed wandering at will over an atmosphere of eternal beauty, like sunset clouds, bright, golden, and beautiful, but vague, unmeaning, and purposeless, conveying even to himself nothing but "the desire of the moth for the star," and when amidst a tumult of feelings excited by all the circumstances that surrounded him, he first took up the writings of William Godwin, his noble

* New Monthly.

sentiments and suggestions, no less than his startling theories, must have flashed across his mind, as they were the interpretation of his own thoughts, with all the force and conviction of their truthfulness; they must have assisted materially in giving effect and something like decision to his character, arresting his vague aspirations, in the dream-land to which they seemed as yet to belong, and bringing them down into the world of realities to be moulded into shape and form, but they could not add long years of experience to his youthful brow, nor sober his feverish heart to the calm serenity of a middle life; alas! this was never to be his destiny.

The "Enquirer" increased his admiration for its author; and whether, according to his practice, he wrote to Godwin on this occasion to express his delight, does not appear, though it is most probable that such was the origin of his intimacy with that illustrious writer.

At the library of the British Museum, where he became a constant visitor, he dug out the writings of Voltaire and Volney, of Condorcet, and many other French writers; read Lord Bacon's Essays, Sale's Koran, Sir Isaac Newton,

studied Spinoza, and, perhaps, read the life of that remarkable man, who, branded everywhere throughout Europe, except Germany, as an Atheist, impressed Novalis so deeply with his religious fervour that he could find no other title for him than that of a "God-intoxicated man," as if to warn the world of the imbecility of its judgment.

Here, too, he probably read Gibbon, and dipped into the writings of Rosseau and Laplace.

At this period, he also cultivated a more extensive acquaintance with the contemporary authors of his own country in various branches of literature; for his reading appears to have been very miscellaneous, making himself as much a personage of importance with the postman as at Oxford, for he always wrote to those authors who delighted him, and by this means opened a large correspondence.

He was, in fact, a most laborious and unwearying student, to be found book in hand at all hours, reading in season and out of season; at table, in bed, and especially during a walk. This practice he had followed in the public walks and the High Street at Oxford, not less than in

the quiet country, and retired paths; nor in London was he less absorbed by the volume that was opened before him in Cheapside or Bond Street, than in the seclusion of a library. Sometimes a vulgar fellow would attempt to annoy or insult the eccentric student in passing. He always avoided such interruptions by stepping aside, with his vast and quiet agility.*

He carried this studious propensity sometimes to a pernicious excess, reading, it is said, frequently sixteen hours out of the twenty-four. In doors he usually stood to read, and his favourite place for putting his book was on the corner of the mantel-piece, from which enticing spot it required some extravagance to withdraw his attention.

"If I were to read as long as you do, Shelley," said a friend to him on one occasion, "my hair and my teeth would be strewed about on the floor, and my eyes would slip down my cheeks, into my waistcoat pockets, or at least, I should be so weary and nervous that I should not know whether it were so or not.

* New Monthly.

"He began to scrape the carpet with his feet, as if teeth were actually lying on it, and looked fixedly in his friend's face; and his lively fancy represented the empty sockets.

"The poet's imagination was excited, and the spell that bound him to his books was broken; and creeping close to the fire, and as it were under the fire-place, he commenced a most animated discourse."*

In the midst of these various readings, he prosecuted his metaphysical studies with the same ceaseless ardour, if indeed they could be said at any time materially to incline him to any other direction.

Perpetually grasping after the abstract and the spiritual, the conception of liberty, of love, of truth and beauty, were ever associated, in his mind, with the idea he formed of the infinite, and as such, all things seemed to serve as a means towards an end.

He was one of those who having once drunk at the fountain of knowledge, was sent forth upon the world to experience that he who tastes

* New Monthly.

of those waters shall never cease thirsting, but, striving ever to quench his thirst at the various channels open to him, shall thereby only render it so much the more the famine of his nature. He had yet to learn the limits of the knowable, and if not born to solve the mystery of existence, it was necessary he should tempt it to that end.

Thus we find him, in 1812, not long after this period, and before he was twenty, writing to a friend, "During my existence I have incessantly speculated, thought, and read."

* Man is not born to solve the mystery of existence; but he must nevertheless attempt it, in order that he may learn how to keep within the limits of the knowable.—GOETHE.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Shelley's theory of dreams—Effects of noting down his own—Classification of dreams—Wanderings in dream-land—Spiritual speculations—Immortality of the soul—Ante-natal state—Love of children—Novel theory concerning them—Does knowledge exist before birth?—Amusing anecdote.

THE spiritual nature of these speculations kept Shelley at this time so much above the world of realities, that Medwin speaks of them as fitting him for the "Clouds" of Aristophanes. Now it was, when to all appearance he stood in danger for the means to live, he busied himself with the theory of dreams.

He noted down those which occurred to him, which from one page soon grew to occupy several, and he seemed by this system so far to encourage

the habit of dreaming that it made up the greater part of his existence.

It revived in him his old habit of somnambulism, to what extent we may guess, when told by Medwin "that at five o'clock in the morning, being accidentally in Leicester Square, he was attracted by a group of boys collected round a well-dressed person lying near the rails, whom he soon discovered to be Shelley, who had thus unconsciously passed a part of the night, nor could he give any account of how he got there."

He began to classify his dreams under two distinct heads, the Phrenic and the Psychic, relating a singular phenomenon which happened to him, by which he considered it sufficiently well established that the mind and the soul were distinct and separate entities.

He stated that it had more than once occurred to him to have a dream, which the mind was pleasantly and actively developing, when in the midst it was broken off by another—a dream within a dream, a dream of the soul, distinct from the mind, which was in no way conscious of it.

These phantom visitings in sleep, and strange

intimations from that shadowy world, more the result probably of an overwrought sensibility of his nervous temperament than anything else, must have affected him in a singular manner, for he spoke of waking from them with a start of horror, as though they occasioned a severe shock to his frame.

Certain it is, however, he seemed in himself to illustrate the sublime theory, that by contemplation we become a part of that which we contemplate, for the continual dwelling on such ethereal subjects had the effect of etherealising his own nature, till instead of a creature of earth, he seemed himself more like the embodiment of some bright vision, or, as Leigh Hunt remarks, like a spirit that had darted from its orb, and found itself in another planet.

Dream-land was to him an unexplored country, which to the philosophical discoverer might yield rich and abundant harvest; for if the hand of death lifted up the veil of the future, and by liberating the soul through the portals of eternity, admitted it at once to the grand mystery of all mysteries, not the less might sleep, in her visioned loveliness, which to him was the transitory death

of existence, by admitting it into the mazy labyrinths of her enchanted palaces, enable us to obtain glimpses, however faint, of our immortal nature.

According to the theory just advanced, of the separation of the mind from the soul during the repose of slumber, this bodily tenement, with all its animal functions of life, which he comprehended under the term mind, might remain calm and tranquil, with features "fixed and meaningless," while the free and disembodied soul, thus released for a time from its mortal bondage, and with wings no longer bent to earth by the coils of humanity, might recover something of its original purity, and rising midst other scenes and other spheres, perhaps commune with essences of its own nature.

Such things, however, were only for the highly-gifted and more refined of our species, and waking could only be detected by the mind itself becoming spiritualized in the highest degree compatible with human existence, or, in other words, by the imagination attaining that exalted height and purity, when soaring above the earth, it becomes fitted only for communion with spirits.

With such theories he endeavoured to idealize his own nature, whereby his nervous temperament was wound up to an intense degree of sensibility; and while his active mind pondered for ever upon, and drew conclusions from his sensations, his reveries increased their vivacity, till they mingled with and made one with thought, and both became absorbing and tumultuous, even to physical pain.*

The immortality of the soul was a deeply-rooted conviction in Shelley's mind from the earliest period, and the doctrine of the metempsychosis, and ante-natal state, not properly belonging to Plato, but made sufficiently his own by the elaborate treatise in the "Phedon," had excited his ethereal faculties from the first reading it, in an extraordinary degree.

It satisfied the benevolence of his heart, for as expounded by the Athenian philosopher it justified "the ways of God to man;" for the pleasurable or painful lot, the happiness or misery

* Such is the intelligent and clear-sighted remark made by Mrs. Shelley, in a foot-note to Shelley's "Speculations in Metaphysics;" to which I refer the reader for further elucidation.

awarded to us in this life, appeared to be but the reward or punishment for our good or evil doing in a former existence.

But far from unravelling the grand mystery, it only led him to the boundaries of the palpable, which was the very infancy of thought, and for speculation to cease at this point was impossible; but to proceed was to lift up his imagination and put off into the shoreless infinite, where all becomes absorbed in spirit, and the problem of existence, together with the sublime mystery of God, appals the heart as well as the understanding of man.

Shelley's was not a mind to be deterred by difficulties, but the very incomprehensibility of the subject was the thing most calculated to excite his vigorous and richly imaginative faculties.

To speculate on subjects that possess the charm of novelty, is at all times peculiar to youth; but added to it, to soar to those lofty regions where the sublimest intellects of all ages have endeavoured, but in vain, to penetrate, is more peculiarly the part of the youth of a great genius, bowed down with the "gift and the faculty divine," and as yet only dazzled and

bewildered by the splendour of its own creative powers.

When first awakened to Plato's attractive theory, the thirst of his soul was to obtain some glimpses of our former existence.

At Oxford, we are told, he would often pace about his room, slowly shaking his wild locks, and discourse in a solemn tone and mysterious air concerning our condition in our ante-natal state, our mode of life, and occupation in the world where, according to his divine teacher, we had attained to erudition, and had advanced ourselves in knowledge, so that the most studious and the most inventive, in other words those who have the best memory, are able to call back a part only, with much pain and extreme difficulty, of what was once familiar to us.

Such contemplations at that period seemed to sanctify his natural love of children; for from regarding them, merely as they appealed to his domestic virtues, he came to regard them also as the frail vessels of an immortal nature, which had not only gathered a whole cycle of knowledge in a past existence, but which held also a knowledge of the future, only that the putting

on its robes of mortality had been like casting a thick veil of darkness over its bright pure vision, and immersing itself in the waters of oblivion.

With such notions, intensely excited, it could not but be matter of surprise and mystery how the soul could so soon forget all its acquirements. Was all knowledge obliterated at the moment of birth, or did it gradually fade from the tablet of memory as the child grew to consciousness of its new existence?

Was the soft spiritual smile that will sometimes play on the face of an innocent and unconscious child the result of dreaming? If so, what did it dream of?—surely, not of earth. What then?

Such a train of thought was by no means difficult for Shelley's mind, and his poetical fancy might soon suggest an answer.

How far these speculations rendered him oblivious of facts as they appear in this world of realities we may best judge from an anecdote by Hogg, which is best told in his own words. He says—"One Sunday we had been reading Plato together so diligently, that the usual hour of exercise passed away unperceived.

"We sallied forth hastily, to take the air for half an hour before dinner. In the middle of Magdalen Bridge we met a woman with a child in her arms.

"Shelley was more attentive at that instant to our conduct in a life that was passed or to come than to a decorous regulation of the present, according to the established usages of society—in that fleeting moment of eternal duration styled the nineteenth century. With abrupt dexterity he caught hold of the child.

"The mother, who might well fear that it was about to be thrown over the parapet of the bridge into the sedgy waters below, held it fast by its long train. 'Will your baby tell us anything about pre-existence, madam?' he asked, in a piercing voice, and with a wistful look.'

"The mother made no answer, but perceiving that Shelley's object was not murderous, but altogether harmless, she dismissed her apprehension, and relaxed her hold.

"'Will your baby tell us anything about pre-existence, madam?' he repeated, with unabated earnestness.

"'He cannot speak, sir,' said the mother, seriously.

"'Worse and worse,' cried Shelley, with an air of deep disappointment, shaking his long hair most pathetically, about his young face; 'but surely the babe can speak if he will, for he is only a few weeks old. He may fancy, perhaps, that he cannot, but it is only a silly whim; he cannot have forgotten entirely the use of speech in so short a time, the thing is absolutely impossible.'

"'It is not for me to dispute with you, gentlemen,' the woman meekly replied, 'but I can safely declare that I never heard him speak, nor, indeed, any child of his age!'

"It was a fine placid boy; so, far from being disturbed by the interruption, he looked up and smiled. Shelley pressed his fat cheeks with his fingers, commended his healthy appearance and equanimity, and the mother was permitted to proceed, probably to her satisfaction, for she would, doubtless, prefer a less speculative nurse.

"Shelley sighed deeply, as he walked on. 'How provokingly close are these new-born babes!' he ejaculated; 'but it is not the less

certain, notwithstanding their cunning attempt to conceal the truth, that all knowledge is reminiscence; the doctrine is far more ancient than Plato, and as old as the venerable allegory, that the Muses are the daughters of Memory, and not one of the nine was ever said to be the child of invention.'"

CHAPTER XIX.

Shelley's Theology—Sectarianism—Its natural consequences—Necessity of toleration—Shelley an expounder of Scripture—And teacher of Christianity—His definition of Prophecy—Of miracles—Of divine inspiration—His ideas concerning Christ.

AMONG all Shelley's early speculations in ethics, physics, and metaphysics, we may very well be curious to know what were his peculiar opinions on the subject of theology, more especially since the gentle spirit of humility and forbearance displayed by his Christian contemporaries, could only find vent in invective and vituperation of the most damning character, in making him out, as he says himself, "a strange prodigy of pollution and wickedness."

Implicit acceptance of whatever might be advanced by the schoolmen, can scarcely be expected from any mind capable of exercising its own thinking faculties, more especially when those very authorities disagree so widely among themselves; and, if Shelley speculated on the various points of belief, he only followed the example set him by all the teachers of all the dogmas, in all the sects of all the different churches that strike out from the great Christian root, many of whom, I may remark in passing, have so far refined upon the original simplicity of our faith, that in the double-distilled vapour left behind, not unfrequently, it is difficult even to guess at the amount of Christianity proper, that, by condensation, might be found remaining in the peculiar tenets they advocate.

These heresies and errors, these unfortunate divisions and subdivisions of belief, these contradictions and motes which each discovers in the eye of his neighbour, have rendered the simplicity of faith required of us, much more difficult now-a-days, than in the times of a Wickliffe or a Luther; and, indeed, have carried us so far out of the Gospel of Christ, that wars

and contentions are engendered, and not peace; and worldliness, and sophistry, and convenience often usurp that spiritual empire taught by our Saviour, and expressed in the purity of the lives of his immediate followers.

When we read of the humility of his disciples, of the self-denials, the patient endurance of his apostles, and behold how different things are now, we may well learn the charitableness of suspecting ourselves wanting, before we reflect intolerantly towards others: nor, amidst all the flimsy conceits and nice points of belief, which often trouble us with strange misgivings as to the exact path to pursue, can we suppose they are far from the truth, who obey the fundamental principles, and act up to the true spirit of Christianity.

Happily, a MS. of Shelley's has fallen into my hands, illustrative of his earlier opinions in theology; and this I believe to be the only one preserved of those school-boy speculations alluded to by Medwin, but of which he could supply no sample.

It is difficult to attach a precise date to this paper, of which the two first pages are lost, but

from internal evidence I fix its composition to the period of his two first novels.

The notions advanced have the same leaning towards religion in its common acceptation; and I can scarcely hesitate at pronouncing the composition of the same date.

It is too crude for publication entire; but some extracts will enable the reader to judge of its value in speaking of the opinions he advocated at that period of his life.

The paper itself is a treatise on prophecy, for discussing the nature of which he takes the Scriptures as substantial and veritable authority; observing that "all considerations which relate to this question must be drawn from Scripture alone; for what conclusions can we establish with respect to matters which exceed the limits of our own understanding, besides the doctrines delivered in the writing or traditions of the Prophets? and, since in our own times we acknowledge no prophets, nothing is left to us but the contemplation of those sacred volumes which have been handed down from those whom we do acknowledge, with this caution, indeed, that we determine nothing on the subjects of which

they treat, or attribute anything to the Prophets themselves, which does not flow directly from their own words.

"Here," he continues, "we should observe that the Jews never acknowledge secondary or intermediate causes; but from a sense of religion, or (as the vulgar would allege) from a desire of rendering homage to God, refer everything to divine interference.

"If, for instance, they have made a successful adventure in commerce, they say that God gave it them. If they desire anything, it is their phrase to say, 'God has disposed my heart thus.' If any imagination suggests itself to their thoughts, they say that God has told it them.

"Everything, therefore, that Scripture asserts God to have communicated to anyone, is not to be considered prophetic and supernatural, but only that which Scripture expressly affirms."

Thus, while he bends reverently and devoutly, as he might express it, by the light of pure reason, rather than the light of the imagination, he seems by no means willing to regard as miraculous, or the result of divine intervention,

such narratives as are only given as simple historical records, always allowing for Oriental figures of speech, and the peculiar mode of expression adopted by the Jewish nation.

He commences by attempting to explain prophecy, as differing only in degree from human foresight, which he calls "natural knowledge;" the former being nothing more than a much clearer preception, and more far-seeing vision, than enjoyed by mankind in general; but singularly enough he proceeds immediately to "a more elaborate consideration of other causes and means through which God reveals those things *which exceed the limits of natural knowledge.*"

Of these "causes and means" he says Scripture affords three examples, namely: "By words, by signs, and by a combination of both;" but inspiration is always a necessary adjunct, which he speaks of as "a peculiar disposition of the imagination," making it appear that the words and signs may be actual or imaginary.

Here, too, there is full scope for his favourite theory of dreams, for the revelations made to the Prophets are often spoken of as conveyed in

visions; and speaking of sleep, he calls it "a condition of body and mind when the imagination is best prepared to the shaping out those things which are not."

Under this last medium of communication, he classes many things which are not given as visions. Such as God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son. God's first making himself known to Samuel, who at first mistook his voice for that of Eli. One he seems to consider a kind of day-dream, the other inspiration, as just defined, which would make it appear that visions and the peculiar disposition of the imagination are in many respects the same thing.

Every reader will observe how favourable such views were to draw the young speculator to a sceptical conclusion, though for the time being he seemed to be walking with safety over Mahomet's bridge.

It is worthy of note, that every page exhibits diligent and careful reading of Holy Writ, which he shows every willingness to receive as a sacred record, nor is it less curious to find him expounding a difficulty that might be a stumbling block

to a sceptical reader. Thus in one portion, he says:

"It is the opinion of many of the Jews, that the words of the Decalogue were not promulgated by God; but that at the time of its delivery nothing but an obscure tumult was heard by the Israelites, in which no words were to be distinguished, but that the laws of the Decalogue were then communicated to their minds, without the intervention of language.

"This opinion," he continues, "has so much foundation, as the circumstance of the variations of the Decalogue of Exodus from that of Deuteronomy may afford; whence it should seem to follow (inasmuch as God never spoke but once) that the Decalogue assumes to teach, not the very words, but only the *opinions* of God."*

This interesting manuscript concludes with the following remarkable passage, which I think must astonish all readers, when they remember it is written by Shelley. He says:

"The sacred Scriptures announce no other

* "Opinions" does not appear to be exactly the word intended—not the very words, but the embodiment of the Divine will, seems to be more Shelley's meaning.

means besides these, through which God reveals himself to man, none are therefore to be admitted into our conception of His nature; and although we distinctly apprehend that God may communicate immediately with the mind of man without the intervention of material means, yet that intellect must necessarily be of a nature more elevated and excellent than the intellect of man, which can perceive within itself anything not comprised under the original elements of human knowledge, whence I am induced to believe that no person ever arrived at so great an eminence above mankind except Christ, to whom the decrees of God, conducive to human salvation, were immediately revealed, without either words or visions, God manifesting himself through the mind of Christ to the Apostles as formerly to Moses through the mediation of an aërial voice.

"Therefore the voice of Christ, like that which Moses heard, may be called the voice of God; and thus it may be said that the wisdom of God, that is superhuman wisdom, assumed human nature in Christ, and that Christ was the way of salvation.

"But I must warn the reader that I here avoid the consideration of certain doctrines, established by some churches, concerning Christ, which, utterly unable to comprehend, I neither affirm nor deny.

"That which I have affirmed," he continues, "I infer from Scripture, for it is nowhere stated that God appeared or spoke to Christ, but that God revealed himself through Christ, to the Apostles, and that he was the way of salvation: and, lastly, that the old law was immediately delivered through an angel, and not by God himself.

"Therefore, if God spoke to Moses face to face, as one man with his friend (that is through the intermediation of two bodies); Christ communicated with God mind with mind.

"We may assume, therefore," he concludes, "with the exception of Christ, none ever apprehended the revelations of God, without the assistance of the imagination, that is, of words or forms imaged forth in the mind, and that, therefore, as shall be shown more clearly in the following chapter, the qualification to

prophecy is rather a more vivid imagination than a profounder understanding than other men."

Such is the kind of speculative Christianity Shelley advocated at this time, which, perhaps, may not inaptly be regarded in the light of a compromise between heterodoxy and orthodoxy; but I cannot help remarking that the unskilful hand is so evident in the composition that the confusion of argument and Scripture-reference is by no means calculated to convey a clear impression to the mind of the reader, who is rather surprised into the conclusions than led to them by any natural sequence; indeed, the hazy metaphysics which lie in ambush at various points seem to threaten every moment to hurry the writer to conclusions of a very different nature.

Such, however, I am persuaded, were the peculiar opinions which enabled him to pass the ordeal of matriculation at Oxford, where, with milder and more liberal treatment, they might have been worked out to the happiness of the pupil, and, I doubt not, more to the satisfaction of his teachers.

Turning from these various speculations and

studies, these earnest readings, and high aspirations—fully, however, comprehending their strictly spiritual tendency—let us follow the events of his life, and we shall soon have an opportunity of seeing how they served him in the capacity of authorship.

CHAPTER XX.

Harriett Westbrook—Shelley's precipitate marriage—Its prospects—Anger of his father—The poet's mother again—His destitute condition—Timely relief from Captain Pilford—His arrival at Keswick—Kindness of the Duke of Norfolk—Becomes acquainted with Southey—Anecdote of Shelley's wife—Southey's account of Shelley.

At the period of Shelley's residence in London, one of his sisters was pupil at a second-rate boarding-school at Balham Hill. This, it may be remarked, was in strict keeping with Sir Timothy's niggardly system of educating his children.

On a visit to this sister, as he was walking in the garden of the seminary, a young lady, a beautiful blonde of scarcely sixteen, passed by them: Shelley was immediately struck by the

beauty of her appearance, and ascertaining from his sister that she likewise was a boarder at the school, induced her to become the medium of comunication between him and his fair charmer.

He was not long in addressing her in an elegant epistle, nor was an intimacy long in ripening, for a boarding-school miss may not be considered loth to be wooed.

The name of this young lady was Harriett Westbrook, the daughter of a retired innkeeper, and therefore, as society is at present constituted, far beneath him in birth and station; but, however much to be desired by the parents of the one, to connect themselves with the heir to a rich baronetcy, or however much to be deprecated by those of the other, the youthful lovers discovered no intention of consulting any other than their own inclinations.

It is impossible to tell what were the secret workings of Shelley's heart throughout this affair. Medwin is of opinion, that beyond the personal endowments of the young lady, there might have been some magic in the name of Harriett, while a reviewer, in coupling this with the cruel disappointment of his first dream

of love, asks the question, "Was it revenge for his slight that set Shelley a marrying?"

So mysteriously are the springs of our nature played upon, that both these circumstances might have had their due effect—passion and wounded pride may receive an impulse from the fortuitous association of a name, or a chance resemblance, which may lead a youth of ardent temperament to the commission of an error that may entail upon him a life-long misery and repentance.

However, a reconciliation about this period was effected between our poet and his father, and probably, from the time of its occurrence, advantage was taken of the Midsummer holidays to accompany his sister to Castle Goring, where he was again received coldly into the bosom of his family.

He was not long in discovering the hollow insincerity of the reconciliation; and after submitting impatiently for some five or six weeks to the uneasy restraint under which he found himself placed, he suddenly left the paternal mansion, where, with one brief exception, he never afterwards entered.

He borrowed some money of Medwin's father before quitting Horsham, but gave no clue to his ultimate intentions. All his movements on this momentous occasion were enveloped in considerable mystery, and the only thing that remains certain is, that after some half-dozen stolen meetings, which extended over an intimacy of as many weeks, Shelley, by a species of knight errantry, carried off his youthful mistress from her father's residence in Chapel Street, Grosvenor Square, whence the young couple proceeded with all dispatch to Gretna Green, where they were united at the end of August, 1811.

Continuing their route on to Edinburgh, they mained there a short time to pass the honeymoon. They next directed their steps back to Cuckfield, in Sussex, where they resided in the house of Shelley's maternal uncle, Captain Pilford, who now supplied the place of a father; for Sir Timothy entertaining high notions of the dignity of his family, though he added little lustre to it himself, grew furious when the news of his son's *mesalliance* came to his ears, and sternly

refused either to afford him shelter, or to render him the smallest pecuniary assistance.

Little, indeed, could be expected from such an union, conceived in haste and concluded with the utmost precipitation; where neither possessed, even in the slightest degree, the knowledge of the requirements of the other, or had had time, could they have been old enough, to deliberate upon their individual capacities for rendering them mutually happy. Alas! it required little foresight to predict that this ill-assorted marriage, "begun in folly," would "end in tears."

Notwithstanding, in the beginning, everything promised well, and when they had been married two months, during which period we may presume they had learned something of each other's character, in a letter dated Cuckfield, twenty-first of October, 1811, Shelley says: "In the course of three weeks or a month, I shall take the precaution to be re-married;" which intention he afterwards accomplished, probably by the advice of his uncle.

While residing with this maternal relative, the poet's mother, Lady Shelley, during the absence of Sir Timothy on his parliamentary duties, in-

vited him to Field Place, where, he says, "he was received with much *show affection.*"

After the mother had played her part in this manner some two or three days, she presented a parchment deed for her son to sign, which, he says, "opened his eyes to the false varnish of hypocritical caresses, and led to his refusal."*

This is the only circumstance recorded, which gives us any clue to the character of Shelley's mother. What was the object to be obtained by his signature does not transpire; but from subsequent events it seems evident that some "infamous concessions" were sought after, connected with the property he should inherit on coming of age. Flying from such a home, and such affections, he appears never afterwards to have met either his father or mother.

He was at this time destitute of all means of subsistence, and seems to have been entirely dependent upon the gallant and generous heart of Captain Pilford, who supplied him with money for his immediate necessities, and

* Medwin's Life of Shelley, vol. i. p. 170.

advised him to seek a cheap abode in some distant county.

Mr. Westbrook, the father of the poet's "child wife," appears, to some extent, to have become reconciled to their elopement, and, softened by their necessities, grudgingly loosened the strings of his purse.

Under these ominous circumstances, the youthful pair proceeded to Cumberland for the purpose of economy, which in these days would seem, as indeed it was then, a strange delusion.

Arriving at Keswick, they were received kindly into the best circles of the neighbourhood, through the warm interest which the Duke of Norfolk immediately evinced in their behalf—a nobleman who, in this instance, showed that "true hearts," which the laureats tell us, "are more than coronets," can be allied to the coronet also.

Holding large possessions, which intersected Westmoreland and Cumberland, in which are comprised the beautiful estates of Gobarrow Park and Ulleswater, his Grace wrote to many of the gentry among his agricultural friends, requesting

them to pay such neighbourly attentions as were in their power.

"He was an old friend of the Shelley family," says De Quincy, "and generously refused to hear a word of the young man's errors, except when he could do anything to relieve him from their consequences."

He had directed his own agents to furnish any accommodations Shelley might require; and the result of his communications in the neighbourhoood was, that Robert Southey immediately called upon him.

De Quincy and many others soon followed his example, among whom probably might be numbered Wordsworth and Professor Wilson; for these were the illustrious names which at that period attracted attention to the lake districts.

An intimacy soon sprang up between Southey and our poet, prompted by pure generosity and kindness on one side, and admiration and enthusiasm on the other; for Shelley saw only in Southey the author of Wat Tyler and Thalaba, while Southey felt his generous sympathies awakened towards a noble and misused nature.

"I met him," he says, "upon terms, not of friendship, indeed, but of mutual goodwill. I admired his talents, thought that he would outgrow his errors, (perilous as they were), and trusted that, meantime, a kind and generous heart would assist the effect of fatal opinions which he had taken up in ignorance and boyhood." *

It is suggested, that Southey was the friend who induced Shelley to fix his abode at a cottage on the Penrith Road, for the purpose of bringing him easily within the reach of his hospitalities.

Here it was that the ladies of Southey's family frequently visited Mrs. Shelley. A little circumstance occurred on their first visit, which was at once characteristic of, and betrayed the youthfulness of their fair hostess.

"There was a pretty garden attached to the house; and, whilst walking in this, one of the ladies asked Mrs. Shelley, did the garden also belong to them? 'Oh no,' she replied; 'the

* See Life and Correspondence of R. Southey, vol. v. p. 358.

garden is not ours; but then you know the people let us run about in it whenever Percy and I are tired of sitting in the house.'.

"The naiveté of this expression," adds De Quincy, "'*run about*,' contrasting so picturesquely with the intermitting efforts of the girlish wife at supporting a matron-like gravity, now that she was doing the honors of her house to married ladies, caused all the party to smile. And me," he continues, "it caused profoundly to sigh, four years later, when the gloomy death of this young creature, now frozen in a distant grave, threw back my rembembrance upon her fawn-like playfulness, which, unconsciously to herself, the girlish phrase of '*run about*,' so naturally betrayed."

Of the nature of Shelley's speculations at this period, we may form a fair estimate from a letter which Southey addresses to a friend, dated January 14th, 1812. He says:

"There is a man at Keswick who acts upon me as my own ghost would do. He is just what I was in 1784. His name is Shelley, son to the member for Shoreham; with £6000 a-year entailed upon him, and as much more in his father's power to cut off.

"Beginning with romances of ghosts and murder, and with poetry at Eton, he passed at Oxford into metaphysics; printed half-a-dozen pages, which he entitled the 'Necessity of Atheism;' sent one anonymously to Coplestone, in expectation, I suppose, of converting him; was expelled in consequence; married a girl of seventeen, after being turned out of doors by his father, and here they both are in lodgings, living upon £200 a-year, which her father allows them.

"He has come to the fittest physician in the world. At present he has got to the Pantheistical stage of philosophy; and in the course of a week, I expect he will be a Berkleyan, for I have put him on a course of Berkley.

"It has surprised him a good deal to meet for the first time in his life with a man who perfectly understands him, and does him full justice. I tell him all the difference between us is, that he is nineteen, and I am thirty-seven; and I dare say it will not be long before I shall succeed in convincing him that he may be a true philosopher, and do a great deal of good with £6000 a-year; the thought of which

troubles him a great deal more at present than ever the want of sixpence (for I have known that want) did me.

. . . . . "God help us! the world wants mending, though he did not set about it exactly in the right way."*

* Southey's Life and Correspondence.

CHAPTER XXI.

Shelley a student of Bishop Berkley—Unsuccessful intercession of the Duke of Norfolk with Shelley's father—De Quincy's description of Shelley—The poet's sudden departure from Keswick—Continued destitute condition—His wandering life—Arrival in Cork—Visits Killarney—Arrival in Dublin—Becomes a political agitator—His speech at a repeal meeting.

THE ideal philosophy, as expounded by Bishop Berkley, was a new era in the speculations of our poet, and, doubtless, tended materially to influence the notions he afterwards adopted, and with which he was already so deeply imbued.

In the pursuit of scepticism, what seemed most at this time to attract his notice, was the marginal notes in the volumes which Southey obtained for his perusal; for many years after his visit to Cumberland, in a letter to Leigh Hunt, he said:

"Do you know that when I was in Cumberland, I got Southey to borrow a copy of Berkley, from Mr. Lloyd, and I remember observing some pencil notes in it, probably written by Lloyd, which I thought particularly acute; one especially struck me, as being the assertion of a doctrine of which even then I had been long persuaded; and on which I had founded much of my persuasions as regarded the imagined cause of the universe: 'Mind cannot create, it can only perceive.'"

But Southey seems altogether to have been in error respecting Shelley's pecuniary circumstances; far from being troubled about the amount of good he might do with £6000 a year, his mind was filled with anxiety to learn how to obtain the means for his immediate necessities.

In a letter to his cousin Medwin, dated November 26th, 1811, describing his present abode as a cottage, situate in a lonely spot, which, furnished, cost thirty shillings per week, he anxiously inquires—

"Is there any possible method of raising money without any exorbitant interest, until my coming of age?" and in a second, dated four

days later, the delusion is still farther dispelled of his living on an income of 200 a-year, as allowed by the father of his wife. He says:

"When I last saw you, you mentioned the imprudence of raising money, even at my present age, at seven per cent. We are now so poor as to be actually in danger of being every day deprived of the necessaries of life. I would thank you to remit me a small sum for immediate expenses.

"*Mr. Westbrook has sent a small sum, with an intimation that we are to expect no more;* this suffices for the immediate discharge of a few debts, and it is nearly with our last guinea that we visit the Duke of Norfolk at Greystoke; to-morrow we return to Keswick.

"I have very few hopes from this visit; that reception into Abraham's bosom appeared to me to be the consequence of some infamous concessions, which are, I suppose, synonymous with *duty*."

The explanation of this last sentence is that his grace the Duke of Norfolk had sufficiently advocated the cause of the son to intercede with the father for a reconciliation, a truly

noble undertaking, which, however, failed, as it seems by the expression "some infamous concessions," from the exacting demands of Sir Timothy.

De Quincy, at this time living at Grassmere, thirteen miles from Shelley's new abode, saw but little of him. He says—

"My attention was first drawn to Shelley by the report of his Oxford labours in the cause of infidelity . . . . Some curiosity even then must have gathered about his name, for I remember seeing in London a little Indian ink sketch of him in the academic costume of Oxford. The sketch tallied pretty well with a verbal description which I had heard of him in some company, viz., that he looked like an elegant and slender flower, whose head drooped from being surcharged with rain. This gave to the chance observer an impression that he was tainted, even in his external deportment, by some excess of sickly sentimentalism, from which I believe that in all stages of life he was remarkably free.

"As he had then written nothing of any

interest,"* De Quincy remarks, "I had no motive for calling upon him, except by way of showing any little attentions in my power to a brother Oxonian, and to a man of letters. Some neighbourly advantages," he adds, "I might certainly have placed at Shelley's disposal—Grassmere, for instance, itself, which tempted at that time by a beauty that had not been sullied; Wordsworth, who then lived in Grassmere; Elleray, and Professor Wilson; finally, my own library, which, being rich in the wickedest of German speculations, would naturally have been more to Shelley's taste than the Spanish library of Southey."

But his sudden and abrupt departure from Keswick effectually annulled these prospects. Why he went, or whither, De Quincy tells us he did not inquire, not guessing the interest that Shelley would create in his mind, six years later, by the "Revolt of Islam."

"Some time after," he says, "we heard he was living in Wales. Apparently, he had the instinct within him of his own 'Wandering

* It must be remembered that at this period Queen Mab was not printed.

Jew' for eternal restlessness. But events were now hurrying on his heart of hearts. Within less than ten years the whole arrear of his life was destined to revolve. Within that space he had the whole burden of life and death to exhaust; he had all his suffering to suffer, and all his work to work."

But why he went is easily to be explained. He had found Cumberland to be anything but a cheap place to live in; and, even with his moderate requirements, living as he did with the simplicity of an anchorite, the harsh usage of those who should have loved and cherished him the most had reduced him to sad extremities; and, as his own words explain, he saw himself in danger of standing even in need of the common necessaries of life.

He had heard that Ireland was a cheap country, and a timely remittance from Medwin's father enabling him to quit Cumberland, he without any leaves-taking, took vessel and sailed direct for Cork; proceeding thence to Killarney, he visited its lakes, and its arbutus-covered islands, rendered illustrious or sacred by their ivy-clad ruins, clambered the mountain peaks, and gazed

enraptured over its waterfalls; and after bathing his soul in the ever-living beauty of its enchanting scenery, directed his course to Dublin.

Dr. Drummond tells us that "Shelley selected Ireland as a theatre the widest and fairest for the operations of the determined friends of political and religious freedom."*

The terrible scenes of Irish misery and utter destitution which he had been eye-witness to during this tour, were well calculated to enlarge his already large sympathies for the sufferings of his race; and when he reached the capital, he was fully prepared to employ his heart's best energies in the endeavour to ameliorate the condition and dreadful privations of the Irish people, and to enter into the political agitation which then as at all times disturbed that unhappy country.

Arriving in Dublin, Shelley appears to have taken up his abode at No. 7, Lower Sackville Street, and at once devoted the strong energies of his mind to the subject of Repeal.

He attended their public meetings, and mounted the rostrum to declare his sentiments

* See Life of Hamilton Rowan.

on the misgovernment of Ireland, with that enthusiasm for liberty which never chilled in his burning and feverish heart.

It is probable, however, his eloquence was very ineffective, for an Irish gentleman, Chief Baron Woulfe, who remembered him speaking at a meeting of the Catholic board, has described him as exhibiting a peculiarity of manner, which is a great fault in oratory.

He says he would utter a sentence, then pause as if he were taking time to frame a second, which was slowly enunciated, giving to the whole speech the effect of unconnected aphorisms.* His voice too was devoid of all melody; but poets are seldom orators, and if he failed in this he was by no means singular.

We are, however, enabled to form some idea of Shelley's eloquence on the subject of Repeal from a report in the Dublin "Evening Post," of 29th February, 1812, of a speech delivered by him at a meeting which took place on the previous evening at Fishamble Street Theatre. The Earl of Fingall was in the chair, and the

* North British Review, vol. viii.

chief speakers are said to have been "Mr. O'Connell, Mr. Wyse, Lord Glentworth, and Mr. Shelley." The report runs thus:—

"Mr. Shelley requested a hearing. He was an Englishman, and when he reflected on *the crimes committed by his nation on Ireland,* he could not but blush for his countrymen, did he not know that arbitrary power never failed to corrupt the heart of man. (Loud applause for several minutes).

"He had come to Ireland for the sole purpose of interesting himself in her misfortunes. He was deeply impressed with a sense of the evils which Ireland endured, and he considered them to be truly ascribed to the fatal effects of the legislative union with Great Britain.

"He walked through the streets, and he saw *the fane of liberty converted into a temple of mammon.* (Loud applause.) He beheld beggary and famine in the country—he never saw such in any country; and he could lay his hand on his heart, and say that the cause of such sights was the union with Great Britain. (Hear, hear.) He was resolved to do his utmost to promote a Repeal of the Union.

"Catholic Emancipation would do a great deal towards the amelioration of the condition of the people; but he was convinced that the Repeal of the Union was of more importance. He considered that the victims whose members were vibrating on gibbets, were driven to the commission of the crimes which they expiated by their lives, by the effects of the Union."

CHAPTER XXII.

Shelley a political writer—Publishes "An Address to the Irish People"—Its tendencies—And general character.

THE youthful politician did not limit himself to speaking. He employed his versatile pen in the production of a voluminous pamphlet, which he published under the title of "An Address to the Irish People," with an advertisement on the title-page, stating that "The lowest possible price is set on the publication, because it is the intention of the author to awaken in the minds of the Irish poor a knowledge of their real state, summarily pointing out the evils of that state, and suggesting rational means of remedy—Catholic

Emancipation and a Repeal of the Union Act, (the latter the most successful engine that England ever wielded over the miseries of fallen Ireland,) being treated of in the following address as grievances which unanimity and resolution may remove; and associations conducted with peaceful firmness, being earnestly recommended as means of embodying that unanimity and firmness which must finally be successful."

This pamphlet, dated No. 7, Lower Sackville Street, was written apparently in England, previous to Shelley's visit to Ireland, and was first published at the moderate price of five-pence, the author gravely informing us in a postscript, that "*he has now been a week in Dublin*, and has made himself acquainted with the public mind, and is prepared to recommend an association for the purpose of restoring Ireland to the prosperity which she possessed before the Union;" a remarkably brief period, we may readily conceive, for a youth of nineteen to make himself acquainted with the wishes and necessities of a nation; and he promises another pamphlet in which he shall reveal the plan and structure of the proposed association.

The "Address to the Irish People" opens with an appeal to the universal brotherhood of nations—one of Shelley's favourite doctrines:

"FELLOW-MEN,—I am not an Irishman; yet I can feel for you. I hope there are none among you who will read this address with prejudice or levity, because it is made by an Englishman. Indeed, I believe there are not. The Irish are a brave nation. They have a heart of liberty in their breasts; but they are much mistaken if they fancy that a stranger cannot have as warm a one.

"Those are my brothers and my countrymen who are unfortunate. I should like to know what there is in a man being an Englishman, a Spaniard, or a Frenchman, that makes him worse or better than he really is.

"He was born in one town, you in another; but that is no reason why he should not feel for you, desire your benefit, or be willing to give you some advice, which may make you more capable of knowing your own interests, or acting so as to secure it.

"There are many Englishmen who cry down the Irish, and think it answers their end to

revile all that belongs to Ireland; but it is not because these men are Englishmen that they maintain such opinions, but because they wish to get money, and titles, and power.

"They would act in this manner to whatever country they might belong until mankind is much altered for the better, which reform, I hope, will one day be effected.

"I address you then as my brothers, and my fellow men; for I would wish to see the Irishman, who, if England were persecuted as Ireland is—who if any set of men, that helped to do a public service, were prevented from enjoying its benefits as Irishmen are—I should like to see the man, I say, who would see these misfortunes and not attempt to succour the sufferers when he could, just that I might tell him he was no Irishman, but some bastard mongrel, bred up in a court, or some coward fool who was a democrat to all above him, and an aristocrat to all below him."

Shelley seems to have laid down that enlightened policy of submission and forbearance, to the people he addressed, which was afterwards adopted with so much success by the great Irish agitator, O'Connell.

Throwing all his generous sympathies into their cause, he becomes the champion of Catholic Emancipation and the Repeal of the Union; but in their aspirations after liberty, he endeavours "to hold the balance between popular impatience and tyrannical obstinacy, and inculcates both the right of resistance and the duty of forbearance." Taking truth to be the firm rock upon which every cause should be based, he exclaims:

"If you are convinced of the truth of your cause, trust wholly to its truth; if you are not convinced, give it up: in no case employ violence.

"The way to liberty and happiness, is never to transgress the rules of justice and virtue. If you destroy the one, you destroy the other. However ill others may act, this will be no excuse for you, if you follow their example; it ought rather to warn you from pursuing so bad a method.

"Depend upon it, Irishmen, your cause shall not be neglected. I will fondly hope that the schemes for your happiness and liberty, as well as those for the happiness and liberty of the

world, will not be wholly fruitless. One secure method of defeating them is violence on the side of the injured party.

"If you condescend to use the same weapons as your enemy, you put yourself on a level with him. On this score you must be convinced that he is, on those grounds, your superior. But appeal to the sacred principles of virtue and justice, then how is he awed into nothing; how does truth show him in his true colours, and place the cause of toleration and reform in the clearest light!

"I extend my views not only to you as Irishmen, but to all of every persuasion, and of every country. Be calm, mild, deliberate, patient; recollect that you can in no measure more effectually forward the cause of reform than by employing your leisure time in reasoning and the cultivation of your minds. Think, talk, and discuss. The only subjects you ought to propose are those of happiness and liberty.

"Be free and be happy; but first be wise and good. You are a great and brave nation; but you cannot yet be all wise and good. You may

be at some time, and then Ireland will be an earthly paradise."

The violence employed by the people, he declares, caused the failure of the French Revolution.

"The cause which they vindicated was that of truth, but they gave it the appearance of a lie, by using methods which will suit the purpose of liars as well as their own. Speak boldly and daringly what you think. An Irishman never was accused of cowardice; do not let it be thought possible that he is a coward. Let him say what he thinks; a lie is the basest and meanest employment of men; leave lies and secrets to courtiers and lordlings; be open, sincere, and single-hearted.

"Let it be seen that the Irish votaries of freedom dare to speak what they think; let them resist oppression, not by force of arms, but by power of mind, and reliance on truth and justice.

"Will any be arraigned for libel? Will imprisonment or death be the consequences of this mode of proceeding? Probably not. But if it were so, is danger frightful to an Irishman, who

speaks for his own liberty, and the liberty of his wife and children? No; he will steadily persevere; and sooner shall pensioners cease to vote with their benefactors than an Irishman swerve from the path of duty. But steadily persevere in the system above laid down; its benefits will speedily be manifested. Persecution may destroy some, but cannot destroy all; let it do its will, ye have appealed to truth and justice: show the goodness of your religion, by persisting in a reliance on these things, which must be the rules even of the Almighty's conduct."

He proceeds to tell his readers, "Rebellion can never, under any circumstances, be good for their cause. It will bind you more closely to the work of the oppressor; and your children's children, whilst they talk of your exploits, will feel that you have done them an injury instead of a benefit."

In an eloquent apostrophe to the nation, he exclaims, "Oh! Ireland, thou emerald of the ocean, whose sons are generous and brave, whose daughters are honourable and frank and fair; thou art the isle on whose green shores I have desired to see the standard of liberty

erected—a flag of fire, a beacon at which the world shall light the torch of freedom!"

Again, in addressing the people, he says:

"I am interested in your cause, not because you are Irishmen or Roman Catholics, but because you are men and sufferers. Were Ireland at this moment peopled with Brahmins, this very same address would have been suggested by the very same state of mind. You have suffered, not merely for your religion, but some other causes which I am equally desirous of remedying.

"The union of England with Ireland has withdrawn the Protestant aristocracy and gentry from their native country, though they are dissipated in another. The very poor people are most nefariously oppressed by the weight of the burden which the superior classes lay upon their shoulders. I am no less desirous for the reform of these evils (with many others) than for the Catholic emancipation."

To bring about all these desirable results, he is content to rest upon moral force. Believing in the eternity of Truth and Justice, he looks to the cultivation of wisdom and virtue in each

family of the nation as the means to produce them, and exhorts the people so to conduct themselves as to progress towards that ultimate perfectability which he believes man destined to attain.

He warns them against false teachers and popular demagogues, and invites them to sobriety and diligence in their respective callings; the education of themselves and of their children; the avoidance of meeting in mobs, reminding them that—

"Before the restraints of government are lessened, it is fit we should lessen the necessity of them. Before government is done away with, we must reform ourselves."

Nor did he stoop to flatter their passions or prejudices. He tells them, which was perhaps injudicious, considering the cause he advocated and the people he addressed, that the Roman Catholic religion had of old been a bad thing.

"The Inquisition," he writes, "was set up, and in the course of one year thirty thousand people were burnt in Spain and Italy, for entertaining different opinions to the pope and the priests.

"The bigoted monks of France in one night massacred eighty thousand Protestants. This was done under the authority of the pope. The vices of the monks and the nuns in the convents were in those times shameful; people thought they might commit any sin, however monstrous, if they had money enough to prevail on the priests to absolve them." * * *

"Some teach you that others are heretics, that you alone are right. Beware, my friends, how you trust those who speak in this way; they will, I doubt not, attempt to rescue you from your present miserable state, but they will prepare a worse. Your present oppressors, it is true, will then oppress you no longer, but you will feel the lash of a master a thousand times more bloodthirsty and cruel.

"Evil designing men will spring up, who will prevent you from thinking as you please—will burn you if you do not think as they do. Take care then of smooth-faced impostors, who talk, indeed, of freedom, but would cheat you into slavery." * * *

"In order to benefit yourselves and your country to any extent, habits of sobriety, regu-

larity, and thought, are previously so necessary that without these preliminaries, all you have done falls to the ground. You have built on sand. Secure a good foundation, and you may erect a fabric to stand for ever as the glory and envy of the world."

This eloquent pamphlet concludes in the following manner:

"The organisation of a society whose institutions shall serve as a bond to its members, for the purpose of virtue, happiness, liberty, and wisdom, by the means of intellectual opposition to grievances, would probably be useful—for the formation of such a society I confess myself anxious.

"Adieu, my friends! may every day's sun that shines on your green island see the annihilation of an abuse, and the birth of an embryo of melioration. Your own hearts, may they become the shrine of purity and freedom, and never may smoke to the mammon of unrighteousness ascend from the unpolluted altar of their devotion."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Shelley seeks the acquaintance of Hamilton Rowan—Becomes an Irish historian—Pleasing picture of his wife—Is a disciple of Pythagoras—Is suspected by the government—Abrupt departure from Ireland—Takes refuge in the Isle of Man—Proceeds to North Wales—Wanderings—Settles in Radnorshire—Proposes settling on a farm—Removes into Caernarvonshire—His benevolence—Instance of his great generosity.

In Shelley's efforts for the regeneration of Ireland he sought the acquaintance of Hamilton Rowan, expecting to find in him a zealous coadjutor. This worthy man was at that time living in Dublin, at rest from his political labours, "and whether," says Dr. Drummond, "a Shelley, a Spurzheim, or an Owen came to enlighten the good citizens of Dublin, he was sure to find in Rowan a kind

and hospitable friend." To him he forwarded a copy of the pamphlet, together with the following letter:—*

"Although I have not the pleasure of being personally known to you, I consider the motives which actuated me in writing the enclosed sufficiently introductory to authorise me in sending you some copies, and waiving ceremonials in a case where public benefit is concerned.

"Sir, although an Englishman, I feel for Ireland, and I have left the country in which the chance of birth placed me, for the sole purpose of adding my little stock of usefulness to the fund which I hope Ireland possesses, to aid her in the unequal yet sacred combat in which she is engaged.

"In the course of a few days I shall print another small pamphlet, which shall be sent to you. I have intentionally vulgarised the language of the enclosed. I have printed fifteen

* Letter dated 1, Lower Sackville Street, February 25th, 1812.

hundred copies, and am now distributing them throughout Dublin."

"How the letter and pamphlet were received," continues Dr. Drummond, "does not appear, though it cannot be doubted that Mr. Rowan treated the young enthusiast with his wonted courtesy and hospitality.

"It is probable, however, that Shelley soon discovered that Ireland was not so favourable a theatre for his operations, nor the Irish people of a temperament so combustible as his own ardent imagination led him to expect."*

No doubt the doctor was pretty correct, for soon afterwards we find him abandoning his pamphleteering propensity for a more laborious task.

In a letter addressed to Medwin, dated 20th March, 1812, from No. 17, Grafton Street, Dublin, he says:—

"I am now engaged with a literary friend in the publication of a voluminous history of Ire-

* Dr. Drummond's "Life of Hamilton Rowan."

land, of which 250 pages are already printed, and for the completion of which I wish to raise £250. I could obtain undeniable security for its payment at the expiration of eighteen months. Can you tell me how I ought to proceed? The work will produce great profits."

Who his coadjutor was remains an entire mystery, but nothing seems to have come of this "voluminous History of Ireland," for it was never more heard of.

We are presented with a pleasing picture of the poet and his young wife, by one who became acquainted with, and occasionally visited them in Dublin. The simplicity of their habits as well as their domestic and moral virtues are herein beautifully portrayed; they apparently lived in great attachment towards each other, and while they were both Pythagoreans, Shelley himself spoke and conversed as a man believing in the metempsychosis.

Animal food, however, seems to have been tolerated; for on one occasion a fowl was murdered for the entertainment of their friend; and Mrs. Shelley is spoken of as "an amiable

and unaffected person, very young and very pleasing."*

But Shelley's endeavours in Ireland seem to have produced nothing but misfortune to himself, as indeed did all his undertakings, though always advanced with the best intentions and the purest motives.

Becoming an object of suspicion to the government, by the promulgation of his revolutionary principles, strongly tinctured as they were with "The Rights of Man," he hastily quitted her shores, on receiving a hint from the police, and took refuge in the Isle of Man, at that time a safe asylum for debtors as well as political offenders.

Resting at Douglas a brief period, towards the end of March, or the beginning of April, he embarked in a small trading vessel, with only three hands on board, to sail for North Wales, in the face of tempestuous weather.

This adventure was likely to have proved fatal to him, but for his own individual exertions; for being overtaken by a storm, he discovered such

* North British Review.

skill and decision in the management of the vessel, that the skipper, attributing their safety to his ability, refused on landing to accept his fare.*

From the time of his landing in North Wales, we hear nothing of him till after wandering about over this wild and beautiful country, under the delusion that the myrmidons of the law were on his track, he appears again at Rhayador, in Radnorshire; for by a letter dated April 25th, 1812, from this spot, he says:—

"After all my wanderings, I have at length arrived at Nantgwillt, near Mr. T. Grove's. I could find no house through the north of Wales, and the merest chance has conducted me to this spot. Mr. Hooper, the present proprietor, is a bankrupt, and his assignees are empowered to dispose of the lease, stock, and furniture, which I am anxious to purchase. They will all be taken at a valuation, and Mr. T. Grove has kindly promised to find a proper person to stand on my side. The assignees are willing to give

* Medwin's "Life of Shelley."

me credit for eighteen months, or longer; but being a minor, my signature is invalid. Would you object to join your name in my bond, or rather to pledge yourself for my standing by the agreement when I come of age? The sum is likely to be six or seven hundred pounds.

"The farm is about 200 acres, 130 acres arable, and the rest wood and mountain. The house is a very good one, the rent £98, which appears abundantly cheap. My dear sir, now pray answer me by return of post, as I am at present in an unpleasant state of suspense with regard to this affair, as so eligible an opportunity for settling in a cheap, retired, romantic spot, will scarcely occur again."

There is something very droll about the idea of Shelley at the age of nineteen settling down with his girlish wife, upon a farm, and giving up all his great schemes for the regeneration of man, to attend to the ploughing of his fields and the growing of his crops; but the scheme, as might be expected in the present unsettled state of his mind, as well as of his affairs, was soon abandoned, and starting off again on his wanderings,

we next hear of him at Tarrycalt, in Caernarvonshire, where he rented a cottage of Mr. Maddocks, a gentleman who, like all, says Medwin, who really knew Shelley, perfectly idolised him.

Here his restless and troubled heart at last found some temporary relief and quiet from the anxieties which beset him. The rugged nature of the country, the near neighbourhood of the sea, were congenial to his mind, and, while they helped to develope the poetical faculty within him, they greatly encouraged the contemplations in which he so loved to indulge.

He remained in this wild region nearly twelve months, making himself beloved in the neighbourhood by his unwearying benevolence, relieving the distresses of the poor, visiting them in their humble dwellings, and supplying them with food and raiment and fuel during the winter season, which is particularly bleak in those parts. But one act of profusion surpasses all the rest.

An extraordinary high tide threatened an embankment by which Mr. Maddocks had gained many thousand acres from the sea; the destruction of this would have involved many hundreds in ruin, including his landlord, who at

the time was absent in England. To avert so fearful a calamity, he headed a subscription with £500, and by going himself round the neighbourhood, raised a considerable sum, which enabled him to employ hundreds of workmen, who effectually stopped the progress of the waves.*

How he raised his share of this subscription it is impossible to trace; but, says Medwin, it must have been at some great sacrifice. This in its character was not unlike his offering on one occasion to raise a sum of money on a post obit, to settle on a lady, to enable his cousin Medwin, who was attached to her, to marry her.†

But the complete isolation of the poet's life at this period, confined as he now was almost exclusively to the companionship of the young and inexperienced girl with whom he had so rashly allied himself, had one sad result. It brought him ample leisure for that reflection which should have been made beforehand. It gave him full opportunity for judging how far they were suited to each other, to what extent he met *her* requirements, how far she responded to the intense

* Medwin's "Life of Shelley."

† See Shelley Papers in Athenæum, 1832.

yearnings of *his* deeply impassioned and highly sensitive nature.

We may guess with what satisfaction, by an extract from a letter to a friend, dated August of this year. Shelley says—

"I am a young man, not of age, and have been married for a year to a woman younger than myself. Love seems inclined to stay in the prison, and my only reason for putting him in chains, whilst convinced of the unholiness of the act, was a knowledge that in the present state of society, if love is not thus villanously treated, she who is most loved will be treated worst by a misjudging world."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Shelley an Opium Eater—The consequences—Imaginary attempt upon his Life—Its probable solution—The suspected assassin—Shelley's departure from Wales —Arrival in Dublin—Return to London.

SHELLEY'S departure from this wild and isolated region was hastened by an event which is involved in considerable mystery.

His health, always delicate, appears to have been at this period in a very critical state, and suffering as he was from nervous debility, the nature of his readings and the metaphysical abstractions in which he indulged kept his mind in a continual state of tension, which was still more aggravated by the immoderate use of

laudanum, with which he sought to dull the keen edge of the sorrows and painful thoughts that beset him.

De Quincy has afforded us some insight into the effect of this insinuating drug, and it does not appear that Shelley was wholly free from its baneful influence. He was under the strange delusion that several attempts had been made to cut him off, and that a price was set upon his head; but the most remarkable of any, was that of which he made a deposition before Mr. Maddocks, wherein he declared that an attack had been made upon him by an assassin.

On Friday night, the 26th of February, 1813, he and his wife had retired to bed between ten and eleven o'clock, he having previously loaded a pair of pistols which he always carried with him, *expecting to have occasion for them.* It was a wild and stormy night, and they had not been in bed more than half an hour, when Shelley imagined he heard a noise in the house.

Springing from bed, he seized his pistols and ran down stairs, entering a room from whence it seemed to him the noise proceeded, and

followed the sound of retreating footsteps into an ante-room.

Here, according to Mrs. Shelley's account, Shelley saw a man who, in the act of escaping through the window which opens into a shrubbery, fired at him, but missed his aim—Shelley then returned the fire, but his pistol flashed in the pan, when the man sprang upon Shelley and knocked him down. A struggle ensued, during which Shelley fired his second pistol, with effect, as it seemed, for the man screamed and swore, "by God, he would be revenged," adding that he would murder Shelley's wife and disgrace her sister.

At this point, Mrs. Shelley came down stairs, but the assassin had vanished. The servants had not gone to bed, but strangely enough they never appeared on the scene till the firing and the struggling were over, when the whole of the household assembled in the parlour, where they remained for some two or three hours, when Shelley was sufficiently calmed to induce them to retire to their beds, believing that his assailant was gone for the night.

It appears, however, that Shelley with his

man servant sat up on the watch, and according to Mrs. Shelley's account, she had been in bed about three hours, when she was alarmed again by the report of a pistol. She hurried down stairs, but by the time she got there, all was again quiet, except the storm, which was terrific, the rain descending in torrents and the wind howling as loud as thunder.

Shelley declared that a second attack had been made upon him; he had sent the servant to see what hour it was, and during his brief absence, he heard a noise at the window, and immediately after saw a man's arm thrust through with a pistol, which was fired at him.

The ball passed through the window curtain and Shelley's flannel gown—but he remained unhurt. He took aim at the man, but his pistol again flashed in the pan. He then struck at him with an *old sword which he found in the house*, which his assailant tried to wrest from him, and was just on the point of succeeding, when his servant re-entered the room. The assassin vanished again before any body else could have time to see him, and what is still more singular, he left no trace behind

him, except the hole in the window curtain and in Shelley's flannel-gown. In relating the story, the poet stated that the ball had penetrated his nightgown and *pierced his waistcoat!* but where it struck after it had glanced off does not appear.

Such were the singular facts to which Shelley deposed before the sitting magistrate (Mr. Maddocks) the next morning, and considerable excitement and alarm was created in that quiet part of the country, where not even a robbery had taken place for several years.

Medwin tells us that the horrors of the inn in "Count Fathom" were hardly surpassed by the recital Shelley used to make of this scene; but Mr. Maddocks, after careful consideration of Shelley's statement, arrived at the conclusion that the whole was a horrid apparition conjured up by an over-heated imagination; an opinion, I think, to which all must subscribe when the facts are considered.

I shall have to record later in Shelley's life, his capacity for calling up spectral visitations, and the shadowy world in which his speculations kept him at this time encouraged that

tendency. Moreover, extreme mental and physical debility, and especially an immoderate use of laudanum, peculiarly adapted a being so singularly constituted, for conjuring up any vision of this kind on a wild winter-night by a lonely sea-shore, during the pelting of a pitiless storm.

Shelley, however, was profoundly convinced of the reality of the visitation, and even rested his suspicion on the supposed assassin.

There was a man living in the neighbourhood who had taken offence at some slight he imagined the young poet had offered to him. He avenged himself not only on the private character, but on the public opinions of Shelley.

He obtained the pamphlet which Shelley had published in Dublin, and sent it to the government, denouncing its principles and its author; moreover, he was frequently heard to say that he was determined to drive him out of the country.

This man busied himself the morning after the occurrence with spreading a report that the whole affair was a fabrication of Shelley's, that he might have an excuse for leaving the country

without paying his bills. Did Shelley imagine it was he? If so, it is a remarkable fact, that he did not recognise his antagonist, whom he well knew, in a hand-to-hand struggle.

There is not wanting evidence that the poet's mind was in an extemely desponding state at this period. Preyed upon by the dread of secret assassination, he hastily quitted the scene of this mysterious event.

He proceeded at once to Bangor, where he waited the departure of the boat for Dublin, hoping there to dissipate the painful impressions associated with the place he was leaving.

He arrived in Dublin after a voyage of forty hours, terribly prostrated from the effects of sea sickness, about the 8th of March, nearly a fortnight after his strange adventure. He took up his abode at No. 35 Cuffe Street, Stephen's Green, "a locality," says Dr. Madden, "sufficient to show the nature of the pecuniary circumstances in which Shelley was placed."*

Here his circumstances were reduced to so low an ebb that he was frequently reduced to

* Dr. Madden's Life of Lady Blessington, vol. iii. p. 418.

the necessity of borrowing small sums from his friends to meet his current expenses, but his prodigal liberality never forsook him even in his greatest need; and we find him contributing £20 to the benefit of the Hunts, with the declaration, that although overwhelmed with his distresses, he was by no means indifferent to the necessities of others, suffering for the cause of liberty and virtue.

Shelley's second residence in Dublin was but of short duration; and not long after this period we find him again directing his steps towards London, prompted, as I suspect, by the increased embarrassment of his affairs, as well as the necessity of obtaining legal advice on the subject of his approaching majority.

He arrived in London late in the spring of this year, and from the date of its production, appears to have been engaged upon another literary labour, which now becomes the subject of our consideration.

CHAPTER XXV.

Queen Mab—Its original construction; and subsequent alteration— Notes to Queen Mab—Object and tendencies of the poem—Its private circulation—Its subsequent revision by the author; and ultimate repudiation—General view of Queen Mab.

I HAVE already had occasion to allude to that singularly wild and beautiful poem entitled "Queen Mab," * commenced, according to Medwin, at the age of seventeen; and I am of opinion, from the circumstance of its dedication to the object of his first love, that it must have been completed also before his expulsion from Oxford; but as it stood in its original form, it appears to have been nothing more than a highly imaginative poem,

* A New Edition of "Queen Mab," with Shelley's own revisions, is preparing for the Press.

intended to illustrate his favourite theory of dreams.

The fanciful doctrine that the soul possesses the power of disembodying itself during sleep, and casting off all stain of earthliness as it arose in its simple essence to the attainment of its native dignity, drew him to contemplate it in that state.

> "As it aspires to heav'n,
> Pants for its sempiternal heritage,
> And ever changing, ever rising still,
> Wantons in endless being."

Such a subject held out to Shelley peculiar attractions, since it offered unlimited scope for his imagination, which, requiring the taming influence of maturer judgment, was not less wild and vagrant, than rich, vivid, and soaring in its aspirations.

He could ascend to whatever height he pleased—he could roam through the depths of infinity, whithersoever his inspired fancy led him, without let or hindrance, and utterly resigning himself to his own spiritual thoughts—he could contemplate the universe in all its vast sublimity, resolving the Pleiades and Orion and

myriads of stars, as they arose galaxy above galaxy into "circling systems," which, forming a "wilderness of harmony," fulfilled immutably "eternal nature's law."

There, in the midst of

> "Million constellations tinged
> With shades of infinite colour,
> And semicircled with a belt
> Flashing incessant meteors,"

he might look down from the dizzy height to which his imagination lifted him, to survey, it may be, only through the glowing alembic of his own mind, a glorious universe, the manifestation of Divine Beatitude, and all existence permeated by the great spirit of love, till it became a part and a portion of itself.

Nothing than the spiritual nature of these contemplations can better illustrate how thoroughly he was absorbed in the idealism of Plato, and it is sincerely to be regretted that the original intention of this marvellous poem should ever have been sullied by notions that were afterwards introduced.

But, at the period we are treating of, Shelley was suffering wrongs and provocations of no

ordinary character ; cast upon the world, and abandoned by his natural protectors, with no adequate provocation for such cruel usage, we may conceive the irritation that would naturally arise. Coercion is never likely to convince a youth of ardent temperament; it is much more likely to excite to a daring antagonism.

Such was the effect upon our poet. After his expulsion from Oxford he applied himself more closely, as we have seen, to the sceptical philosophy, which, it is the opinion of Medwin,* he would have entirely abandoned, but for that event, and reverting to "Queen Mab," long since finished and thrown aside, converted what was a mere imaginative poem into a systematic attack upon the usages of society.

He set to work in right earnest, and in correcting the versification almost entirely remodelled the construction of the poem.

Increased by this process to double its original length, from the mere embodiment of his spiritual musings, it became the vehicle of his thoughts for every subject he had been brought

* Medwin's Life, vol. i. p. 153.

to dwell upon; whether they concerned the nature of man or the nature of the Deity, whether they involved the institutions of society or the structure of the universe; whether to stride over the mighty arch of infinite space, and during the revolution of countless ages, to watch the slow ravages of time, or to look down on this "low-seated earth," with deep sympathy for the sufferings of his race.

Regarding religion for the moment as it is too often practised or rather abused, he fell into that kind of error which youth, in its impatience, and the unreflecting of riper years, are most prone to. He attached the vices of its followers to the religion itself, arguing most falsely, that it is ever a proof that the falsehood of a proposition is felt by those who use coercion, not reasoning, to procure its admission. This can only be considered a proof of the incapacity of its upholder.

It was now that he begun to collect and compile those obnoxious notes which we find attached to this brilliant effort of his youth; and that a temporary belief in the truth of the doctrines he there advocated existed in his mind

when they were written, I have no desire to dispute; but it was such a conviction as passion, unmerited suffering, the shrinking sense of unearned disgrace, antagonism, strong excitement and mere wilfulness, are likely to inspire in a beardless youth so delicately organized and possessing such strong susceptibilities as Shelley.

He was not a god, neither was he an archangel. He was but human, and as such was not immaculate, but exhibited some, though few, of the weaknesses, the errors, the fallibilities of his species.

To be just, not to say generous, we must number among these fallibilities the youthful indiscretion of launching in this rude and daring attack upon the institutions, the civil and religious policy of society, especially when there is a whole life, with but one or two exceptions, of unexampled goodness to demand it.

Already, when the work was scarcely completed, and the first excitement of competition subsiding, had allowed him leisure to reflect, he began to drop the presumptuous style of a teacher and reformer, and arrived at the conclu-

sion that he was too young to "judge of controversies," and again desired "that sobriety of spirit, which is the characteristic of true heroism."*

The poet, however, was enamoured of his work, and in spite of what he conceived to be its various errors, he was determined to give his poem to the world; if for no other reason, to ascertain his fate as an author. For this purpose, while residing in Dublin, he forwarded it to a friend in London, intimating at the same time that the notes were preparing, and that they should be forwarded before the completion of the printing of the poem.

His expectations of success in this undertaking were very modest, since he only desired an edition of two-hundred and fifty copies. He was particular, however, that the poem should be printed on very fine paper, so as to catch the aristocrats, remarking, "that they would not read it themselves, but it was probable their sons and daughters would."

The result of this determination was a private

* See Mrs. Shelley's editorial note to "Queen Mab."

volume, which he distributed among his friends, and sent to many of the writers of the day. In a short space of time a copy of this edition fell into the hands of a piratical bookseller, and the poem soon obtained a wide circulation from his reprint.*

This private volume is the same in every respect as the latest edition of that poem; it is dated 1813, and is curious for bearing Shelley's own name as the printer. The title page has three mottos, French, Latin, and Greek, the last being the well-known saying of Archimedes, the geometrician of Syracuse—"Give me whereon to stand, I'll move the earth," which Medwin strangely ascribes to Æschylus.

Though he thus privately printed and circulated "Queen Mab," Shelley never intended publishing it in its present form; and no sooner was this volume printed, than he began to waver in his notions concerning it, and industriously sat down to the work of revision. In this labour he erased many of the objectionable passages, but in the work of castigation he

* Medwin's Life, vol. i. p. 83.

seems also to have rejected much that is not wanting in intrinsic beauty, though his riper judgment refused to let it pass. As an instance of this, he erased all that portion of the poem which stands from page 4 to page 10, which seems, however, first to have gone through the processs of revision.

Nor do his revisions always appear judicious. In the opening of the poem, which stands at present—

> " How wonderful is Death,
> Death and his brother Sleep!
> One, pale as yonder waning moon,
> With lips of lurid blue;
> The other, rosy as the morn
> When, throned on ocean's wave,
> It blushes o'er the world;
> Yet both so passing wonderful:"

he has altered to—

> " How wonderful is Death,
> Death and his brother Sleep!
> One, pale as yonder *wan and horned moon,*
> With lips of lurid blue;
> The other, *glowing like the vital day*
> When, throned on ocean's wave,
> It blushes o'er the world;
> Yet both *so strange and* wonderful."

Most of these revisions, however, exhibit the refinement of taste with which Shelley even at this early period reviewed his earlier labours. The passage at page 3, which stands—

"Hark! whence that rushing sound?
'Tis like the wondrous strain
That round a lonely ruin swells,
Which, wandering on the echoing shore,
The enthusiast hears at evening:"

is altered to—

"Hark! whence that rushing sound?
'Tis like the wondrous strain *that sweeps*
Around a lonely ruin,
When west winds sigh and ev'ning's waves respond
In whispers from the shore."

At page 12, the lines—

"The magic car moved on
From the celestial hoof,
The atmosphere in flaming sparkles flew,
And where the burning wheels
Eddied above the mountain's loftiest peak,
Was traced a line of lightning.
Now it flew far above a rock,
The utmost verge of earth,
The rival of the Andes, whose dark brow
Lowered o'er the silver sea;"

is altered to—

"The magic car moved on
Erom the celestial *pinions,*
The atmosphere in flaming sparkles flew,
And where the burning wheels
Eddied above the mountain's loftiest peak,
Was traced a line of lightning.
Now far above a rock the utmost verge
Of the wide earth it flew,
The rival of the Andes, whose dark brow
Frowned o'er the silver sea."

Again—

"Far, far below the chariot's path,
Calm as a slumbering babe,
Tremendous ocean lay.
The mirror of its stillness showed
The pale and waning stars,
The chariot's fiery track,
And the grey light of morn
Tinging those fleecy clouds
That canopied the dawn;"

is altered to—

"Far, far below the chariot's *stormy path,*
Calm as a slumbering babe,
Tremendous ocean lay,
Its broad and silent mirror gave to view
The pale and waning stars,
The chariot's fiery track,
And the grey light of morn
Tinging those fleecy clouds.
That cradled in their folds th' infant dawn."

At the conclusion of the fourth division of the poem, some additional lines are introduced—

"The buds unfold more brightly, till no more
Or frost, or shower, or change of seasons mar
The freshness of its amaranthine leaves."

And underneath the last line are written the words *α μαραινω*, which might lead us to suppose that while the poet was composing the line he was musing over the Greek derivation of the word amaranthine.

At the commencement of the fifth division of the poem the lines—

"even as the leaves
Which the keen frost wind of the waning year
Has scattered on the forest soil, and heaped
For many seasons there;"

are altered to—

"even as the leaves
Which countless autumn storms have scattering heaped
In wild dells of the tangled wilderness
Through many waning years."

And at the last page of the poem the lines—

"The restless coursers pawed the unwilling soil,
Snuffed the gross air, and then, their errand done,
Unfurled their pinions to the wind of Heav'n;"

are replaced by—

"And from the earth departing
The shadows with swift wings,
Speeded like thought upon the light of Heav'n."

These I only give as specimens of the revisions contained in this curious volume. It is evident from their variety and the nature of them, that Shelley had gone carefully through the poem; and it is to be regretted that he did not publish it in the form his riper judgment and discrimination would have approved of; but two years later he seems to have entertained the idea of entirely remodelling the poem in the form of the regular rhyming stanza of octosyllabic verse; an idea which, from the specimen given in Mrs. Shelley's notes of the Invocation to the Soul of Ianthe, the reader will observe it is by no means to be regretted he did not accomplish.

The volume which Shelley revised, and enriched with many additions and corrections, was left at Marlow, where it had been thrown aside, and, no doubt, forgotten, among the many anxieties he was there subject to. It fell afterwards into the hands of a gentleman

attached to the Owenites, and has been ever since carefully concealed from the eyes of the world. As the poem stands in the original, its doctrines exactly accord with their tenets, and it is to a considerable extent the gospel of the Owenites, while these revisions and erasures would have produced it in a very modified form.

Nor is this volume the only evidence of Shelley's repudiation of this poem in its present form; for many years later, when in Italy, on another edition being published by a London bookseller of this ill-starred creation, the poet was hastily written to by his friends, who feared that, deeply injurious as the mere distribution of the poem had proved, this publication might awaken fresh persecutions.

"At the suggestion of these friends," adds Mrs. Shelley, "he wrote a letter on the subject, printed in the 'Examiner' newspaper;" from which I extract the following. It is dated Pisa, June 22, 1821. He says:

"A poem entitled 'Queen Mab' was written by me, at the age of eighteen, I dare say in a sufficiently intemperate spirit, but even then it

was not intended for publication, and a few copies were only struck off to be distributed among my personal friends.

"I have not seen this production for several years. I doubt not that it is perfectly worthless in point of literary composition; *that in all that concerns moral and political speculations, as well as in the subtler discriminations of metaphysical and religious doctrine, it is still more crude and immature.*

"I am a devoted enemy to religious, political, and domestic oppression, and I regret this publication, not so much from literary vanity, as because I fear *it is better fitted to injure than to serve the sacred cause of freedom.*

"I have directed my solicitor to apply for an injunction to restrain the sale; but after the precedent of Mr. Southey's 'Wat Tyler,' a poem written, I believe, at the same age, and with the same unreflecting enthusiasm, with little hope of success."

Three months later he writes to a friend: "If you happen to have a copy of Clarke's edition of 'Queen Mab,' I should like to see it. I hardly know what this poem may be about. I fear it is

rather rough." With such indifference and neglect did he treat this early effort of his youth.

Such, however, is the history of "Queen Mab," a poem which for sublimity of thought and purity of diction stands pre-eminent among the early efforts of genius. Surveying it with a calm and dispassionate soul, untrammelled by those petty jealousies of religious or political prejudice, we see not sufficient to have called forth that venom and bitter animosity with which its author was assailed on its first appearance.

We acknowledge at once the vigorous hand of dawning genius of the highest cast, whose marvellous powers already discover themselves in flashes of splendid thought, which occasionally strike out from a confused and ill-digested conception clouded with nebulous light, such as may in due season break up and resolve itself into bright creations and starry systems.

We are delighted and affected with his gorgeous imagery and the purity of his aspirations, though we may often stop to smile at the impotent rage with which his unskilful hand wields the dangerous weapons of nonconformity.

While we sometimes regret the unmeaning epithets and sallies to which his ungoverned impetuosity, rather than his calm judgment, blindly and unintentionally hurries him, we see every reason to rejoice over the advent of a great poet, a bold and independent thinker, whose every impulse is against oppression; whose burning and impassioned heart, intensely thrilling with the highest and noblest sentiments of moral beauty, responds to the best, the holiest wishes of humanity.

Witness such passages as the following:—

"Will Ianthe wake again,
And give that faithful bosom joy,
Whose sleepless spirit waits to catch
Light, life and rapture, from her smile?

"Yes! she will awake again,
Although her glowing limbs are motionless,
And silent those sweet lips,
Once breathing eloquence
That might have soothed a tiger's rage,
Or thawed the cold heart of a conqueror.
Her dewy eyes are closed,
And on their lids, whose texture fine
Scarce hides the dark blue orbs beneath,
The baby sleep is pillowed:
Her golden tresses shade

The bosom's stainless pride,
Curling, like tendrils of the parasite
Around a marble column."

* * * * *

"Behold the chariot of the Fairy Queen!
Celestial courses paw the unyielding air;
Their filmy pennons at her word they furl,
And stop obedient to the reins of light:
These the Queen of Spells drew in,
She spread a charm around the spot,
And leaning, graceful, from the ethereal car,
Long did she gaze and silently
Upon the slumbering maid."

* * * * *

"The broad and yellow moon
Shone dimly through her form—
That form of faultless symmetry:
The pearly and pellucid car
Moved not the moonlight's hue.
'Twas not an earthly pageant—
Those who had looked upon the sight,
Passing all human glory,
Saw not the yellow moon,
Saw not the mortal scene,
Heard not the night-wind's rush,
Heard not an earthly sound,
Saw but the fairy pageant,
Heard but the heavenly strains
That filled the lonely dwelling."

* * * * *

"Look on yonder earth:
The golden harvests spring; the unfailing sun
Sheds light and life; the fruits, the flowers, the trees,
Arise in due succession; all things speak
Peace, harmony, and love. The universe
In nature's silent eloquence, declares
That all fulfil the work of love and joy,—
All but the outcast, man. He fabricates
The sword which stabs his peace; he cherisheth
The snakes that gnaw his heart; he raiseth up,
The tyrant, whose delight is in his woe,
Whose sport is in his agony. Yon sun,
Lights it the great alone? Yon silver beams,
Sleep they less sweetly on the cottage thatch,
Than on the dome of kings? Is mother earth
A step-dame to her numerous sons, who earn
Her unshared gifts with unremitting toil;
A mother only to those puling babes
Who, nursed in ease and luxury, make men
The playthings of their babyhood, and mar,
In self-important childishness, that peace
Which men alone appreciate?"

* * * * *

"How beautiful this night! The balmiest sigh
Which vernal zephyrs breathe in evening's ear
Were discord to the speaking quietude
That wraps this moveless scene. Heaven's ebon vault
Studded with stars unutterably bright,
Through which the moon's unclouded grandeur rolls,
Seems like a canopy which love has spread
To curtain her sleeping world. Yon gentle hills,

Robed in a garment of untrodden snow;
Yon darksome rocks, whence icicles depend,
So stainless, that their white and glittering spires
Tinge not the moon's pure beam; yon castled steep,
Whose banner hangeth o'er the time-worn tower
So idly, that rapt fancy deemeth it
A metaphor of peace;—all form a scene
Where musing solitude might love to lift
Her soul above this sphere of earthliness;
Where silence undisturbed might watch alone,
So cold, so calm, so still."

As regards the tendency of this poem, probably no one ever changed his opinions from reading Queen Mab; and while it is dignified with the epithet "philosophical," it can be considered neither metaphysical nor theological, neither political nor ethical, neither for excess nor restraint, but a strange medley of all things, which seems to be against all things, supplying texts both for friends and foes, and on the surface appearing to advocate as much good as evil, as much evil as good.

We are presented with the singular anomaly of spiritual actors of the most exalted and refined character, fulfilling their parts on a spiritual stage, for the avowed purpose of advocating the

cause of materialism, sometimes of the grossest description.

Thus, while Plato and Mirabeau are strangely amalgamated or alternately seen to preponderate in the poet's mind, we are neither startled by his theories, nor hurried away by his facts; by these we are neither induced to become Christians nor Atheists, neither Idealists nor Materialists, neither Democrats nor Socialists, Anarchs nor Constitutionalists, but are left at the conclusion bewildered and dissatisfied at the palpable indecision and want of purpose of the whole.

We are impressed only with the brilliant array of splendid images, with the nobleness, the purity, the goodness of intentions, which are thwarted by the same hand that advances them, with the shortcomings of youth, which riper years may expand, which maturer judgment may embody and grasp, and direct with strength and decision towards great and glorious ends; and, lastly, with the chafings of an irritated and misunderstood nature, which time will rectify, which the inherent qualities of his own heart is sure in the end to repudiate.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The poet's continued distress—His endeavours to raise money—Harshness of his father—Birth of his first child—His extreme poverty—Separation from his wife—Character of his wife—Cause of separation—Suicide of his wife.

DURING the production of Queen Mab the poet's anxieties were thickening fast around him. His wife was on the point of making him a father, and he was yet dependent upon the generosity of others for his subsistence.

He tried every means of obtaining money, and was reduced to the last necessity of borrowing of Jews, no doubt at enormous interest. The only cognizance that Sir Timothy took of his distresses was to endeavour to turn them to his

own advantage, for, some fresh negotiations being opened with him, we learn from a letter of Shelley's, dated June 16th, 1813, the result in these words:

"The late negotiations between myself and my father have been abruptly broken off by the latter. This I do not regret, as his caprice and intolerance would not have suffered the wounds to heal."

And in another letter, a few days later, we gather the hard terms this unscrupulous and unforgiving father was endeavouring to exact from the necessities of his son. Our poet says:

"Depend upon it that no artifice of my father's shall seduce me to take a life interest in the estate. I feel with sufficient force that I should not by such conduct be guilty alone of injustice to myself, but to those who have assisted me by kind offices and advice during my adversity."

Towards the latter end of this month Mrs. Shelley gave birth to a daughter, at Cooke's Hotel, in Dover Street, where they appear still to have been staying. Cheerless indeed were the prospects of that poor child, for the

clouds of misfortune and poverty were gathering thick and fast round the heads of its parents.

On coming of age in August, it was discovered that the estate which Shelley was heir to was strictly entailed, being subject to the life-interest of his father and grandfather, both of whom were living, and that he could still command nothing for his own maintenance; but there is reason to believe that some concession was extorted at this time from the uncharitable heart of the father in favour of his benevolent-minded son.

That this, however, was totally inadequate to relieve him from the incumbrances that had heaped upon him during his adversity, is evident; for, after dragging through the winter of this year, and the following spring (1814), we learn by a letter from Shelley's lawyer, dated April, 1814, that "he has used the utmost of his endeavours to raise money for the payment of his debts, *without success.*"

To such a low ebb were his fortunes reduced towards the middle of the third year of his wedded life; a state of existence which, as shown by the sequel, was productive of anything but

happiness or satisfaction to either party, for at this juncture a separation, by mutual consent, was arranged, and Shelley handed over the yet girlish and inexperienced partner of his misfortunes only, to the care and protection of her father and sister, then living in retirement at Bath, with the pathetic avowal, that they had never loved each other: and that, unable longer to live in happiness together, they had both determined thus to cut the knot they had so inzautiously imposed upon themselves, and which they could not otherwise untie.

The young outcast expressed his regret to the mother of his child, who was again pregnant, that the low ebb of his fortunes prevented him making her the allowance he would wish; and giving her all the money he possessed, he wished her all happiness, and in mutual good will they parted, never more to meet, till assembled before that August Tribunal, where their actions towards each other can alone be judged of.

This was a sad finish to that little piece of romance, opened with so much earnestness, and mutual satisfaction, having for its prelude vows of eternal fidelity—young lover's vows, alas, how

frail! but, nevertheless, like the dews of morning to opening flowers, thence followed by an elopement to Gretna Green, in the very hey-day of the blood, and all seeming to glide on so pleasantly, so satisfactorily.

For some months, all is promise, all is sunshine, and what so bright as the sunshine of the heart of youth, chequered by no thought of the past, and with nothing but the great future stretched out before it beautiful as a vision?

A second marriage is effected, lest some flaw in the first stolen one may render their future insecure; then, on the part of the young poet, marriage settlements are projected in the fulness of his heart, to make his girlish wife still more secure; for some sudden calamity may overtake *him*, and leave *her* unprotected, unprovided for; and away they go on butterfly wing, roaming from one sweet scene of enchantment to another, now at the beautiful fall of Ulleswater, not far the classical Ambleside, now floating dreamily over the lakes of Killarney, listening to strange unearthly legends, or basking in the sunlight of her fairy-like islands, climbling the mountain

tracts, or reposing softly in sweet sylvan retreats..

All is holiday and romance, and there is no time for thought, but the girlish wife is seen aping the demure matron, or tripping about the garden with "fawn-like playfulness," or partaking the simple diet of fruits and vegetables and pure water, with the benevolent young poet, adding the graces of ease and amiability to her personal endowments, which make it seem that the youthful couple live in great harmony, and are much attached to each other.

At length comes a pause, a fatal cessation from these restless wanderings, which has been little else than the flying from their own identity. The first excitement of novelty has subsided, and even though in the midst of Nature's rude magnificence, they are brought closer and more definitely towards each other, and have little resource but in themselves, when the question begins already to tremble on the lip, but not for utterance, "What is this that we have done?"

Romance is by degrees growing fainter and fainter, and the stern reality struggling to usurp its place; like a dim discovered cloud on the

horizon, as yet no bigger than a man's hand, it is seen afar off, but as it increases it threatens to overwhelm them with its shadow.

They are returning to their proper selves; they begin to look into their own and into each other's heart, and the desires of each, the hopes and expectations, already seek their fulfilment. Dare we ask what these buoyant hopes and expectations are? Alas! they are too deeply graven in the opposite characters of each ever to result in mutual happiness.

On the one hand there is a giddy and thoughtless school-girl, whose chief characteristic is a want of character; one of the myriad nonentities of the world, whose personal charms, indeed, might well serve in a narrow sphere of existence, but who in all else is but as breathing clay; a body without soul, a heart without depth or passion, which intellect does nothing to expand, which a contemptible system of education has done nothing to elevate or soften. One who in the divine rite of marriage sees nothing, comprehends nothing over and above the girlish frolic of a fashionable elopement, but an escape from the oppressive and irksome authority of her

father and elder sister,* and the means of becoming her own mistress in her own cherished home, where, shut up in her poor silly conventionalisms, and common-places, she might live out her allotted portion, with all her little wishes administered to, her little vanities gratified; in the meanwhile making no pretensions whatever to intellectual distinction, to heroism, or the advocacy of a cause however trivial or however great.

On the other hand, there is Shelley, the "Eternal Child," a being of glorious poesy, comprehending all its aspirations, all its exalted idealisms. One whose very person is the type and shadow of his genius; slight and fragile in form, angelical in face, fair, golden, and freckled, seemingly transparent with an inward light, and his soul within him

"So divinely wrought,
That you might almost say his body thought;" †

he paces the earth "with inward glory crowned,"

* Speaking of Shelley's elopement, Medwin says, "he carried off his bride from Chapel Street, Grosvenor Square, where she sorely complained of being subject to great oppression from her sister and father."

† Edinburgh Review, 1840.

bending beneath the load of humanity, which sits upon him as an uneasy garment, and acknowledges only his proper existence in the splendid visions of immortality which dazzle and oppress him.

Wedded to wisdom and "divine philosophy," he sits

"Apart from men, as in a lonely tow'r,"

to worship Nature in all her Protean shapes and forms, seeking alike his kindred with the stars of heaven and the flowers of the earth.

But considering him less spiritually, he stands before us a being of intense human sympathies, capable of the softest and the strongest emotions of our nature, marked by all those impulsive qualities of genius which alike declare the weak frailties of humanity and the divinity that is within us; for they are mostly of the highest and the noblest character, never of a selfish kind, but sometimes of a nature to entail on him repentance, which in the sequel will be shewn to have bowed down his head with sorrow, and fretted his locks with hairs untimely grey.

His heart is kindled into generous enthusiasm

at the sacred altars of love and liberty, and his benevolent mind seeks to embrace humanity in its lofty aspirations.

Nor while he grasps thus at universals, does he pass over individuals; he is ever active in relieving the distresses of the poor, entering beneath their lowly roofs to inquire into their necessities, and to admininister to them food and raiment, and is not only ready and willing to share his last sixpence with a friend or stranger, but to give the bread which is needful for his own sustenance to a beggar in the streets. This is no figure of speech, but, as will presently be seen, literally true. If Shelley ever forgot any one, it was himself.

Moreover, he is a youth on the dawn of manhood, surrounded with all the roseate hues of its aurora light, which, as it has gradually descended upon him, has awakened his heart to that deep inner mystery of ours which gives to it a sense of its loneliness, and a desire for companionship with its mate, companionship of thought and feeling, of hope and love and aspiration, and joy.

He looks not for happiness in the gratification

of the lower passions or of the humbler cravings of humanity, but associates the new desire that has grown up within him with his dream of the perfections of womanhood.

The spiritual excellence that is within him instinctively yearns after its antitype, the soul of his soul, "the mirror whose surface shall reflect only the forms of purity and brightness," "an understanding capable of clearly estimating his own; an imagination which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities which he has delighted to cherish and unfold in secret."*

With such requirements he is little inclined to consider marriage in the light of a flimsy contrivance for legalising the intercourse of the sexes, a mere matter of convenience for contracting parties, or as a means of protecting the moralities of a nation.

As such it is an act at once unrighteous and unholy; to him it is something higher and holier, it is the folding to himself the divided half of his being; the fulfilment of the divine law of love which directs the beautiful and the pure in us

* See his own Essay on Love.

towards the beautiful and the pure in others; the earthly realisation of his spiritual desires, which are for ever grasping, for ever soaring towards the infinite good, till he becomes wrapped in the sublime vision of the great Spirit of the Universe!

Such are the two beings brought now face to face, whose interests the world declares henceforth identical, and who must jointly pursue their destiny as best they may, bound up together in chains the strongest, from which there is no escape.

It is evident from the first, to all but themselves, that their hopes and interests have been separate and distinct, that there has been no sympathy of thought or action between them.

The young idealist has continued in the path he has laid down for himself, and has wandered from place to place, bearing with his misfortunes under the effect of strong excitement and the high aspirations produced mostly by the agitated state of society in which he lived; and his girlish wife has followed him in all his wanderings, without understanding him in any one respect, sometimes in fear of the police author-

ities, sometimes in danger of being deprived of the necessaries of life, never with the comforts of a home, in which a woman finds her proper sphere, and above which her ambition never aspires.

At length they are returned to London, romance is now at an end, and they have become too conscious of the cold reality, with the gaunt visage of poverty casting its bleak shade around them. The young wife has become a mother, still homeless, and missing all those domestic comforts which, in place of affection, had been chiefly the hope of her marriage.

That Shelley, who was ever tender towards the meanest thing that crawls upon the earth, treated her with kindness and distinction, there can be no doubt, and the scanty evidence we possess sufficiently proves, but mutual disappointment and dissatisfaction could alone be the result, and the separation which at last took place was but the ripened fruit of their first imprudence.

That Shelley, in this last step, was not only blameless, but felt himself aggrieved, appears from different passages of his works; this

feeling is strongly marked in the dedication of the "Revolt of Islam," in the verse commencing

> "Alas that love should be a blight and snare
> To those who seek all sympathies in one!"

More evident still is it in some very melancholy stanzas, written about the period of their separation, where he seems to tell her

> "Duty and dereliction guide thee back to solitude."

The bitterness of the following stanza can scarcely be mistaken:—

> "Away, away! to thy sad and silent home;
> Pour bitter tears on its desolated hearth;
> Watch the dim shades, as like ghosts they go and come,
> And complicate strange webs of melancholy mirth.
>
> The leaves of wasted autumn woods shall float around thine head,
> The blooms of dewy spring shall gleam beneath thy feet:
> But thy soul or this world must fade in the frost that binds the dead,
> Ere midnight's frown and morning's smile, ere thou and peace may meet."

But let us follow this poor girl to the end of her story, that we may not have again to return to it.

Delivered over to the care of her father, she was again subject to that harshness she had desired so to escape from, and which seems to have been characteristic in him ; the first dereliction from duty had by this time entailed on her sufficient sorrow and repentance, but it is probable that the want of refinement of feeling on the part of her father tended rather to heighten than lessen her sense of it, as well as to add to the burden of her unfortunate position.

A few months after the separation, her second child was born, and she continued to live with her children under the roof of her father, in retirement from the world, till the latter end of the year 1816, two years and a half after being separated from her husband, when she committed suicide by throwing herself into a pond at the foot of her father's garden.

This terrible catastrophe, when it reached Shelley's ears, overwhelmed his heart with agony, and for some time produced a temporary derangement of his intellect ; sufficient evidence that he was far from being indifferent to her fate, and that he reproached himself at the time

for the sad consequences which could scarcely be laid to his charge.

But the calm serenity and peace of mind which succeeded to the violent agitation of his nervous temperament is equal evidence that he had not to reproach himself with any harshness or neglect as contributing to such an end.*

With what depth of feeling does he allude to her in the following lines:

"That time is dead for ever, child!
Drowned, frozen, dead for ever;—
We look on the past,
And stare aghast
At the spectres wailing pale and ghast,
Of hopes which thou and I beguiled
To death on life's dark river.

The stream we gaz'd on then roll'd by;
Its waves are unreturning;
But we yet stand
In a lone land,
Like tombs to mark the memory
Of hopes and fears which fade and flee
In the light of life's dim morning."

Poor weak heart! there were many non-entities in the world with whom she might have lived long and happily, according to her desires,

* See De Quincy.

but, like a glittering moth, she flew at the glare, which at first seemed only to soil her gentle wings, but in the end it drew her into its terrible vortex, which resulted in her destruction!

CHAPTER XXVII.

Shelley's acquaintance with Mr. Peacock—With William Godwin—With Mary Godwin—Character of Mary Godwin—Shelley's visit to the Continent—Arrival at Calais—At Paris—A pedestrian tour—Shelley purchasing an ass—Arrival at Neufchâtel—Description of the Alps—Arrival at Lucerne—The Assassins—Voyage down the Reuss—Down the Rhine—Arrival in Holland—Return to England.

THE exact period of Shelley's meeting with Mary Woolstonecraft Godwin does not appear. It has been hinted that her father, William Godwin, assisted the poet in compiling the notes to "Queen Mab," but for the truth of this not the slightest evidence exists, and it is most probable that, various and arduous as that labour was,

it was one which Shelley accomplished without assistance.

He was very solicitous for literary friendships, and his habit of writing to those whose works he admired, facilitated the means, while it directed him almost exclusively towards those whose kindred thoughts and aspirations seemed already to have established between him and them a communion of soul.

His earliest intimacy of this nature was with Mr. T. L. Peacock, author of "Headlong Hall," "Nightmare Abbey," &c., to whom the majority of his letters from abroad are addressed in terms of the most refined friendship; and in this instance, literary excellence was by no means the occasion, for Mr. Peacock had not yet written his first work of fiction.

This gentleman, while yet a very young man, had shared some, if not all of the poet's wanderings in Wales. At this time, he had his way to make in the world, which, in his case was to strive against contending circumstances and the frowns of fortune, which only served to awaken Shelley's generous sympathies, and to bring into action those higher qualities of his truly noble nature.

Left, by the separation from his wife, unshackled in his literary pursuits, it is most probable that Shelley's intimacy with William Godwin, and subsequently with his highly-gifted and accomplished daughter, was pursued soon after that event.

Freed, as he considered himself, from his first engagement, he proceeded, in the spirit of Milton's doctrines, to pay his court to another lady,* nor is it to be wondered at that he should have been attracted by the many graces of person and mind of Mary Godwin.

Risen like the young Phœnix from the ashes of her mother, the celebrated authoress of "The Rights of Women," the radiance of whose fame surrounded the dawn of her existence with a halo of light; living likewise in the lustre of the great genius of her father; gifted herself with powers that either might have borne witness to with more than parental pride; when Shelley first met her, she appeared before him with all those associations and attractive qualities which could appeal at once to his intellect. Added to these, the graces of her person, the charms of

* Leigh Hunt.

her conversation, the fine sensibility and delicacy of her highly-wrought and impassioned nature, which, like his own, sought the beautiful and the good in all things; and, above all, the strong heart of love which distinguished her;—she was in every way calculated to respond to his highest and best wishes, as well as to strike upon the finest chords of his own burning heart.

Nor was Shelley less calculated, by the grasp of mind, the spirituality of his talk, or the strange, unearthly beauty of his face, to attract and enthral the highly-sensitive and accomplished girl, just blushing into womanhood.

She had been reared, too, under a code of morals which Shelley had long since deeply imbibed from her father, and had already preached; one which, however pure and simple in itself, however suited to better natures, and a more perfect state of existence, is open to every kind of abuse and licence with the vicious of this or any other age, and can, therefore, only be adopted with safety by such as have thoroughly convinced themselves of the purity of their motives, and the utter unselfishness of their

own natures; and, still further, which nothing but the sequel can justify.

The result of the meeting of two such beings was as might have been expected; either entertaining the highest notions of morality, they did not shrink from following in their own persons that part of their system relating to the union of the sexes.

They pledged their loves to each other; and, from the moment of that engagement, which, with them, was the most solemn and sacred, they continued to live together a life distinguished for its purity and goodness, and the happiness which continued to rain down upon them, only to be strengthened and exalted by the many vicissitudes of their chequered and troubled existence.

Shelley's naturally fragile health had been much broken by the trials and troubles that had heaped upon him of late; and, on the 28th July of this year (1814), accompanied by Mary Godwin and another lady, a near relative of hers, he started on a continental tour, to try the effect of the climate of the south.

Quitting London, they arrived at Dover, at

four in the afternoon, and their impatience to reach Calais would not allow them to await the packet the following day, so, hiring a boat, with the assurance from the boatmen that they would row them across the channel in two hours, they at once set off.

Being overtaken by a squall which put their lives in great peril, their tedious passage was prolonged till sunrise the next morning, when they at last reached Calais, thoroughly exhausted, and totally unfit to pursue their journey.

When they had sufficiently refreshed themselves by rest, they continued their journey on to Paris. Staying here for a week, as much in the expectation of a remittance from London as from their desire to see the city, they formed the resolution of walking through France.

Shelley went to the ass market to purchase an ass, to carry the luggage and one of the ladies by turns on this novel expedition. I should like to have stood, by to witness the young idealist bargaining for an ass, and to have followed him home with his purchase: but, having effected this, they again packed up their luggage, and proceeded towards Charenton,

delighting in the romantic scenery as they passed through it.

The poet soon found his long-eared carrier a very useless animal, and getting rid of it as best he could, obtained something more tractable in a mule, which he purchased for ten napoleons; when they arrived at Gros Bois the little party partook of their simple meal, consisting of bread and fruit and wine, under the shadow of the trees.

So they journeyed on day after day, witnessing sometimes the desolation and the horrors of war in the ruined villages which the terrible inundation of the Cossack hordes had lately left smouldering in flames; and exclaiming at each new scene of beauty, "Oh! this is beautiful enough; let us live here;"—till at length, after many adventures, and some rough usage from the half-civilized peasantry in some of the villages they passed through, the adventurous travellers arrived at Troyes, at which point further pedestrianism was rendered impossible by the poet spraining his ankle.

Here, then, they again disposed of their mule, and after purchasing an open *voiture*, and

hiring a man with a mule who engaged to convey them to Neufchâtel in six days, they journeyed on towards Switzerland.

Their *voiturier* indulged in some strange vagaries on his route, obstinately insisting on stopping where he pleased, and going on when he pleased, and sometimes, when they alighted, starting off many miles ahead of them, leaving them to follow after him as best they could.

But the effect upon the poet's mind of the enchanting scenery through which they passed, and of the wild and rugged grandeur of the Swiss Alps, towards which they continually approached, was of the most entrancing character, as we may well judge from the account given in the "History of a Six Weeks' Tour," wherein the approach to their destination is thus described:

"The mountains after St. Sulpice became loftier and more beautiful. We passed through a narrow valley, between two ranges of mountains, clothed with forests, at the bottom of which flowed a river, from whose narrow bed on either side the boundaries of the vale arose precipitously.

"The road lay about halfway up the mountain, which formed one of the sides, and we saw the overhanging rocks above us, and below, enormous pines, and the river not to be perceived but from its reflection of the light of heaven, far beneath.

"The mountains of this beautiful ravine are so little asunder, that in time of war with France an iron chain is thrown across them. Two leagues from Neufchâtel we saw the Alps—range after range of black mountains are seen extending one before the other, and far behind all, towering above every feature of the scene, the snowy Alps. They are a hundred miles distant, but reach so high in the heavens that they look like those accumulated clouds of dazzling white that arrange themselves on the horizon during summer. Their immensity staggers the imagination, and so far surpasses all conception, that it requires an effort of the understanding to believe that they indeed form a part of the earth."

Such were the fitting scenes for the full development of his poetic faculty; and the rude magnificence of nature, increasing now at

each remove in loftiness and grandeur, served to elevate his soul towards the sublime.

Resting a brief period at Neufchâtel to consider their plans for the future, "they resolved," says the interesting narrative, "to journey towards the Lake of Uri, and seek in that romantic and interesting country some cottage where they might dwell in peace and solitude." Dreams they would have realized but for the want of pecuniary means, that stern necessity which so often intruded itself upon the poet's visions of happiness.

They had exhausted the little capital brought from Paris, and were only able to proceed from Neufchâtel by Shelley obtaining £38 for a £40 bill in discount from a banker of that city; and on this slender support all their romantic schemes for the future rested.

On the third day after quitting Neufchâtel, they arrived at Lucerne, and there hired a boat, proposing either to coast the lake till they should meet with some suitable habitation, or to proceed direct to Altorf, thence cross Mount Saint Gothard, and seek in the warm climate of the country to the south of the Alps an air more

salubrious, and a temperature better fitted for the precarious state of Shelley's health, than the bleak region to the north.

Resting for the night at the small village of Brunen, in the midst of whose glorious mountain and forest scenery the noble-heart of Tell nourished his dreams of liberty, and matured his heroic plans for the overthrow of the tyrants of his country, they dismissed their boatman, and so enchanted were they with the loveliness of the spot, that, for the present, at least, they had no disposition to proceed farther.

They hired the only apartments to be obtained, which they had to furnish themselves, and pay a guinea a month for, and spent their time in the contemplation of the sublime scenes around them, and in the observance of those great phenomena of nature peculiar only to such regions.

Here Shelley commenced a romance on the subject of the Assassins, wherein his cherished dreams of man's perfectability found utterance, and the peculiar idealisms of his nature began to develope themselves in language and diction which far surpassed his former prose compositions.

His description, in this beautiful fragment, of

the valley of Bethzatanai, the beloved retreat of that singular race of enthusiasts, was inspired by the scenes around him, than which nothing could be more vivid or brilliant.

The mountains, he says, "had been divided to their base to form this happy valley; on every side their icy summits darted their white pinnacles into the clear blue sky, imaging, in their grotesque outline, minarets and ruined domes, and columns worn with time.

"Far below, the silver clouds rolled their bright volumes in many beautiful shapes, and fed the eternal springs that, spanning the dark chasm like a thousand radiant rainbows, leaped into the quiet vale, then, lingering in many a dark glade, among the groves of cypress and of palm, lost themselves in the lake.

"The immensity of these precipitous mountains, with their starry pyramids of snow, excluded the sun, which overtopped not, even in its meridian, their overhanging rocks. But a more heavenly and serener light was reflected from their icy mirrors, which, piercing through the many-tinted clouds, produced lights and colours of inexhaustible variety. The herbage

was perpetually verdant, and clothed the darkest recesses of the caverns and the woods.

"Nature, undisturbed, had become an enchantress in these solitudes; she had collected here all that was wonderful and divine from the armoury of her omnipotence. The very winds breathed health and renovation, and the joyousness of youthful courage.

"Fountains of crystalline water played perpetually among the aromatic flowers, and mingled a freshness with their odour. The pine boughs became instruments of exquisite contrivance, among which every varying breeze waked music of new and more delightful melody.

"Meteoric shapes, more effulgent than the moonlight, hung on the wandering clouds, and mixed in discordant dance around the spiral fountains. Blue vapours assumed strange lineaments under the rocks and among the ruins, lingering like ghosts, with slow and solemn step.

"Through a dark chasm to the east, in the long perspective of a portal glittering with the unnumbered riches of the subterranean world, shone the broad moon, pouring in one yellow and unbroken stream her horizontal beams.

"Nearer the icy region, autumn and spring held an alternate reign. The sere leaves fell and choked the sluggish brooks; the chilling fogs hung diamonds on every spray; and in the dark, cold evening, the howling winds made melancholy music in the trees.

"Far above, shone the bright throne of winter, clear, cold, and dazzling. Sometimes there was seen the snow flakes to fall before the sinking orb of the beamless sun, like a shower of fiery sulphur.

"The cataracts, arrested in their course, seemed, with their transparent columns, to support the dark-browed rocks. Sometimes the icy whirlwind scooped the powdery snow aloft, to mingle with the hissing meteors, and scatter spangles through the rare and rayless atmosphere.

"Such strange scenes of chaotic confusion, and harrowing sublimity, surrounding and shutting in the vale, added to the delights of its secure and voluptuous tranquillity. No spectator could have refused to believe that some spirit of great intelligence and power had hallowed these wild and beautiful solitudes to a deep and solemn mystery."

Nor, in depicting the peculiar tenets and characteristics of the people whose pure state of existence he attempts to shadow forth, does he give us a less faithful picture of himself and the spiritual aspirations of his own heart.

He describes them as men who idolized nature and the God of nature; to whom love and lofty thoughts, and the apprehensions of an uncorrupted spirit, were sustenance and life.

"They were already disembodied spirits; they were already the inhabitants of paradise.

"To live, to breathe, to move, was itself a sensation of immeasurable transport. Every new contemplation of the condition of his nature brought to the happy enthusiast an added measure of delight, and impelled to every organ where mind is united with external things, a keener and more exquisite perception of all that they contain of lovely and divine.

"To love, to be beloved, suddenly became an insatiable famine of his nature, which the wide circle of the universe, comprehending beings of such inexhaustible variety, and stupendous magnitude of excellence, appeared too narrow and confined to satiate."

But circumstances soon interrupted these sublime imaginings. They were totally denuded of all domestic comfort in their new abode, and being quite unable to understand the barbarous language spoken by the people, found much difficulty in getting their most ordinary wants supplied; added to these, their stock of cash had dwindled to £28, and they were without the slightest means in the world of obtaining more.

To proceed farther was impossible, or even to stay where they were. The journey from Paris to Neufchâtel alone had cost £60, and how they were to get back to England with only £28, was a matter of great perplexity to the otherwise comprehensive mind of the poet.

Water conveyance being at all times the cheapest, and as they could proceed nearly the whole route by water, they at once determined upon that mode of travelling, and as no time was to be lost, they proceeded at once back to Lucerne.

Here they took the *diligence par eau*, and proceeded along the rapid waters of the Reuss to Loffenberg, descending its many and sometimes dangerous falls with great glee. An un-

romantic incident happened on this voyage, which sufficiently exhibited Shelley's poetic irritability.

Their fellow travellers were of the meanest class, and their uncouth manners and excessive rudeness to the ladies in trying to take possession of their seats, so provoked him, that he knocked one of them down. The man did not return the blow, but talked abusively, in language which fortunately they could not understand, till the boatman interfered and supplied them with other seats.

Hiring at Loffenberg an ill-constructed boat, consisting merely of straight pieces of deal board, unpainted, and nailed together with so little care that the water constantly poured in at the crevices, they continued their dangerous voyage along the rapids of the Rhine, winding among the eddies of the rocks which it was death to touch, and when the slightest inclination on one side would have upset their frail boat.

At length, arriving at Basle, they bade adieu to Switzerland, and continued their delightful voyage, amidst various changes, down the whole length of the Rhine, the poet sometimes reading

aloud to his companions, in an open boat, Mary Wolstonecraft's "Letters from Norway," or passages from some favourite poet, enjoying the while the varied and beautiful scenery through which they passed. After some little delay in Holland, the tourists at last arrived at Gravesend, by packet from Rotterdam, on the 13th of September.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Shelley again in distress—His simple diet—His benevolence—Walks a hospital—Declining state of his health—Prospect of death—"Mutability"—Death of Shelley's grandfather—Improved circumstances of the poet—His simple habits and tastes—His self-denial—Generosity to his friends—Return of health—Tranquillity of mind.

THIS river navigation was to Shelley a source of exquisite delight. It seemed to realise the voyage described in "Thalaba," which had so often excited his imagination. Long afterwards, he would dilate upon it with an enthusiasm that was infectious, describing, in his vehement manner, the descent of the falls, the rushing onward of the boat, the glorious scenery, the grandeur and the sublimity of nature, that had served to elevate his ideas and to store his mind with

images destined one day to adorn the brightest pages of our literature.

Much, however, as this tour had enriched his mind, the excessive fatigue of pedestrianism, aggravated not unfrequently by the impossibility of obtaining beds fit to lie on, in his wanderings, the comfortless dwellings he had been obliged often to put up with, as well as the many thoughts that continually depressed him, had anything but improved his health; and when he set foot on his native soil, he was without a penny in his pocket.

He had, as the narrative tells us, spent his last guinea at Marsluys, a town about two leagues from Rotterdam, where they had been delayed by stress of weather, and, moreover, had nothing to look forward to for his maintenance till the following December. Under these circumstances it is difficult to tell how he existed that terrible three months. His father, whose heart seemed to harden as the sufferings of his son increased, had closed his doors and his purse against him, but the benevolence of his own disposition never failed him. Indeed, the poet's misfortunes brought with them ever a keener sense of the misfortunes of others.

Bread at this time was his chief sustenance, and he would go into a baker's shop to buy a penny roll, and eat it as he walked along the streets, perhaps reading a book in the meanwhile; and it is recorded that the wistful glance of some famished-looking fellow-creature has often prompted him to give his roll away, when he had not another penny in his pocket.

It was during the winter of this year he walked a hospital, that he might the better be able to relieve the sufferings of the poor. Here he became acquainted with disease and death in all their frightful realities, busying himself "in charnels and on coffins," or where

> "Despair
> Tended the sick busiest from couch to couch."

How the sight of human suffering must have torn his heart! and though he hoped to benefit others by the skill he might acquire in this branch of study, it is certain that his highly delicate and sensitive nature would never have permitted him to follow it permanently, or to gain more than a superficial knowledge, though it seemed possible that he would be forced to support himself by some profession.

His health was rapidly declining under accumulated misfortunes, nor was it at all improved by the excessive use of laudanum, taken to dull the keen edge of physical pain, suffering as he did from acute spasms all his life.

These attacks were sometimes of that violent character, that he would be forced to lie on the ground till they were over; but, says Leigh Hunt, he had always a kind word to give to those about him, when his pangs allowed him to speak.

In the spring of the following year, 1815, an eminent physician pronounced that abcesses were forming on his lungs, and that he was dying rapidly of a consumption.

Meanwhile, friends had fallen from him like summer flies, in the chill season of his adversity, and he was left almost alone in London, with Mary Godwin, who, knowing only how to appreciate him, tended and watched over him like some guardian saint, with unwearied love, through the bitterest and most painful trials of his life.

The near prospect of death must at all times give solemnity to our thoughts, and the natural

bent of Shelley's mind being towards those sublime conceptions which have occupied the finest intellects of all ages, the contemplation of the universe, and that sustaining power which kindles it, making it instinct with love and beauty; that dissolution which he now believed at hand and inevitable, taught him to look inward, to watch over the broodings of his own soul, and in its many emotions, to endeavour to trace out as well its origin as its destiny.

In this intense desire to

> "Still those obstinate questionings
> * * * * * *
> Of what we are,"

it was not unnatural, at such a time, that melancholy and something of despondency should pervade his thoughts, and their effect may be traced in the little he wrote at that period.

In the poem on "Mutability," he says:—

> "We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon;
> How restlessly they speed, and gleam, and quiver;
> Streaking the darkness radiantly!—yet soon
> Night closes round, and they are lost for ever.

We rest—a dream has pow'r to poison sleep;
We rise—one wandering thought pollutes the day;
We feel, conceive, or reason; laugh or weep;
Embrace fond woe, or cast our cares away.

It is the same!—for be it joy or sorrow,
The path of its departure still is free;
Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;
Nought can endure but Mutability."

But more prosperous times were at hand, and at last the dark clouds of adversity began to disperse.

On the 5th January, 1815, Shelley's grandfather, Sir Bysshe Shelley, died, upon which event, Sir Timothy, the poet's father, succeeded to his large estates in Sussex, whereby the poet himself became the direct heir, being the eldest son of Sir Timothy.

This circumstance at once placed Shelley in a much higher position, and not only enabled him to raise money for his immediate necessities, but to command something better than he had hitherto received from his father, whose unrighteous and heartless practices were at length brought to a close, and by the advice of a solicitor, an arrangement was effected by which an annuity of a thousand pounds a year was

settled on his son, on what terms is not quite certain, but doubtless, says Medwin, Sir Timothy took care to have good security.

This sudden acquisition of fortune relieved the poet from many painful anxieties. He was placed at once beyond the fear of want, and in comparative affluence.

Peace of mind, which had so long been a stranger to him, again returned, and as suddenly his health seemed restored, while every symptom of pulmonary disease vanished. But pain and debility, says the amiable annotator of his works, were apportioned him in this life; and his nerves, which nature had formed sensitive to an unexampled degree, were rendered still more susceptible by the state of his health.

At this period of his life, he might frequently be seen at the fruit stalls of London streets, buying apples and crunching them as heartily as a school boy, nor did he ever lose any of the child-like simplicity of his character.

His taste for delicacies was the most innocent: besides vegetables, which formed the staple of his diet, he was fond of puddings and

pies, and would greedily eat cakes, gingerbread, or sugar; honey, preserved or stewed fruits, he thankfully and joyfully received from others, but rarely provided them for himself; sometimes he would indulge in the rare luxury of a few raisins to eat with his roll as he walked along the street, and of this we have an amusing anecdote.

He was walking once with his solicitor, from whose side he suddenly vanished, and as suddenly re-appeared with his usual precipitation; in his absence he had entered the shop of a little grocer in an obscure quarter, and had returned with some plums, which he held close under the attorney's nose; and the man of fact, says the narrator, was as much astonished at the offer, as his client, the man of fancy, at the refusal.

His drink was equally simple, consisting of copious and frequent draughts of cold water, and tea was ever grateful to him, cup after cup, and coffee; spirits he almost invariably avoided, and took wine with singular moderation, commonly diluted largely with water.

These simple habits he retained when his

fortune placed the more extensive luxuries of the table at his command, deeming it indispensable to curtail his own expenses that he might have the more to bestow upon what he termed the purposes of justice, which was to relieve the undeserved indigence of men of merit, and to administer comfort of a substantial character to the lowliest of his fellow creatures, wherever his duty seemed to call him.

In this he was wholly unostentatious, and to make any allusion, however distant, to any act of benevolence or generosity, was an unpardonable offence, and a flagrant violation of that unequalled delicacy with which it was done.

"His disposition," says a writer who knew him intimately, "being wholly munificent, gentle and friendly, how generous a patron would he have proved, had he ever been in the actual possession of even moderate wealth. Out of a scanty and somewhat precarious income, diminished by various casual, but unavoidable incumbrances, he was able, by restricting himself to a diet more simple than the fare of the most austere anchorite, and by

refusing himself horses and other gratifications that appear properly to belong to his station, and of which he was in truth very fond, to bestow upon men of merit donations, large indeed, if we consider from how narrow a source they flowed;" and of this we shall have many remarkable instances as we proceed.

This year was the happiest of the poet's life; "he never," says Mrs. Shelley, "spent a season more tranquilly than the summer of 1815." Since the spring of 1811, the date of his expulsion from Oxford, he had lived a whole existence, if, instead of years, we might reckon by the many and the sad vicissitudes he had passed through.

He had been tossed about on the troubled waters of existence, and all his fortitude was called forth to bear up against the strife to which he had been so strangely and unnaturally abandoned.

The favoured child of genius had received that education which, however melancholy to contemplate, is perhaps the best for the full development of his faculties.

His heart must be chastened and purified not

by being a spectator only, but by being a principal in the great drama of the sufferings and wrongs of humanity; not till then can its large sympathies be fully awakened; not till then can it utter them in language that inflames and thoughts that burn.

Shelley's health had been broken in the terrible contest, and the awful shadow of death, while it softened the anxieties of his heart to melancholy as it approached nearer to him, shed a holy tranquillity over his soul.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Shelley's residence at Bishopgate — Excursion to the sources of the Thames—"Alastor"—Mode of its composition—Its character and beauty—Proceeds again to Switzerland—Arrival at Champagnôlle—Journey to Geneva—Arrival at the Sécheron—Description of the Jura.

As soon as the warm summer weather had set in, the poet visited Clifton, and afterwards made a tour along the southern coast of Devonshire. Returning thence he rented a house on Bishopgate Heath, on the borders of Windsor Forest, where he enjoyed several months of comparative health and tranquil happiness,* pluck-

* Mrs. Shelley's notes to his works.

ing the flowers in the fields, or roaming amidst the woodland scenery; or floating on the waters of the Thames, leaving his boat to drift, resigning himself the while to his own splendid thoughts, till he became literally drenched with beauty.

Towards the end of the summer he spent a fortnight, accompanied by a few friends, in tracing the Thames to its source; proceeding as far Crichlade, on the "silvery Isis," he saw all the beauty of its sylvan banks, so well calculated to allure his soul to visions of peaee and love.

In the stanzas written on this occasion, in Lechlade church-yard, we may trace the calm serenity that had settled in his mind. How beautiful are the lines—

"And pallid evening twines its beaming hair
In duskier braids around the languid eyes of day."

He seems almost to have become enamoured of death, with so much of tranquil beauty has its abode inspired him.

But it was reserved for "Alastor" to breathe forth his higher aspirations, to give utterance in harmonious numbers to the deeper and stronger

emotions of his nature, which, as they awakened, unconsciously wove themselves into verse.

This poem was written on his return from that voyage; during its composition he spent his days in the Great Park of Windsor, or on the Thames in its neighbourhood, floating under sylvan banks where the swan only inhabits, or reposing, Druid-like, under the shadow of gigantic oak trees, utterly resigning himself to the feelings of natural piety, and to all those spiritual influences which nature and nature's charms can alone inspire.

How beautiful is this poem, how perfect in rhythm, how solemn and stately in diction, how brilliant in imagery! every thought is pure and holy, every word breathes love. The joy, the exultation which the varied aspects of the universe inspires, and the sad, struggling pangs of human passion, are alike depicted with a skilful hand; they are drawn from his own keen sensations, or suggested by the emotions and yearnings of his own heart.

The gorgeous imagery with which he adorns his poem is but the vivid reflex of all he had himself seen and mused upon in his many

wanderings, whether amidst the lakes and mountains of Cumberland, or the wild echoes of Killarney; whether amidst the rugged grandeur of Welsh scenery on the borders of the ocean, or under the solemn and inspiring shadow of the Swiss Alps; whether along the rapids of the Reuss and the castellated banks of the lordly Rhine, or along the quiet and tranquil bosom of our own sweet valley of the Thames.

Over this, which stands to us as a grand panorama of nature, he seems to move like the spirit of beauty gliding along still waters; like the reflection of moon and star-beam over river, and forest, and stream—over mountain, and valley, and lake, and meadow, spangled with flowers.

Alastor is but the portraiture of his own spiritual existence, reflected in the light of poetry: and for the time being we dwell with him in all things spiritual, while he stands to us the impersonation of an ideal love, seeking repose from that passion on which he nourishes, and which consumes him, in the love of all things animate and inanimate, all things beautiful and good; pouring the beauty of his own soul over all

things visible, and gathering its invisible essence back unto himself.

But vivid and gorgeous as is the imagery, splendid as a whole, minute and perfect in all its detail as is the poem itself, its immediate tendency is to blind with excess of light, to dazzle rather than to please, to excite rather than to satisfy; suggesting eternal restlessness but no repose—the restlessness of his own existence, the bewilderment of his own soaring fancy, the excitement of his own heart.

But the more intimate we become with it, the more its excellencies grow upon us, the more we enter into the spirit of the poet's conception, till at length we are lifted up, as it were, above ourselves, into the very heaven of his thoughts, breathing in a purer and brighter atmosphere of beauty and love—then its apparent inequalities soften down, and its bold contrasts of brilliant sunlight and dim shadow blend and harmonise; but there is a tone of infinite sadness pervading the whole, springing, as it were, out of the hopeless aspiration of Alastor, after that purity and perfection which is not akin to earth, and therefore utterly beyond him.

This renders its deeper tones more sweetly sad, and changes its very exultation and joy into the glad utterance of a heart surcharged with melancholy. This may be best illustrated by the passage in which he follows the flight of a swan to its home, and in which Shelley's own deep yearnings for human sympathy and love are beautifully imaged forth. He says—

> "Thou hast a home,
> Beautiful bird! thou voyagest to thine home,
> Where thy sweet mate will twine her downy neck
> With thine, and welcome thy return, with eyes
> Bright in the lustre of their own fond joy.
> And what am I that I should linger here,
> With voice far sweeter than thy dying notes,
> Spirit more vast than thine, frame more attuned
> To beauty, wasting these surpassing pow'rs
> In the deaf air, to the blind earth, and heav'n
> That echoes not my thoughts?"

In the untimely death that overtakes him in his vain pursuit of a too beautiful ideal, we see the poet's own early fate anticipated, and the hue and colouring its so near approach at this period had already given to his thoughts.

For purity of thought and beauty of diction, as well as for exquisite harmony of versifica-

tion, there is scarcely anything to surpass, and few things to equal, this poem in the whole range of English poetry.

The young poet continued his residence at Bishopgate, in seclusion and tranquillity, till the ensuing spring (1816), when that restlessness, which had now grown habitual again, carried him on the Continent.

Mary Godwin and Miss Clare Claremont, who had accompanied him on his previous visit, were still his companions; and on the 8th May they were again in Paris, from whence they proceeded as far as Troyes, through the same uninteresting tract of country they had traversed on foot nearly two years before.

Branching off here towards Geneva, past Dijon and Dôle, they arrived at Poligny, a small town at the foot of the Jura, whose frowning summits rise abruptly from the plain, and overhang the houses.

Renewing their journey in the evening, they proceeded by the light of a stormy moon towards the little village of Champagnolles, which lies buried in the mountains, along a road exceedingly precipitous on one side, while on the other was a

yawning gulf, filled by the darkness of the driving clouds, and where nothing was to be heard but the dashing of invisible streams, the moaning wind, and the pelting of a violent storm—amidst which they entered the village at twelve o'clock, the fourth night after their departure from Paris.

Here, then, commenced the Alpine part of their journey, and they started again the next morning, still ascending among the ravines and valleys of the mountains, the scenery continually increasing in wonder and sublimity.

"As we ascended the mountains," says the interesting narrative of this journey, "the same clouds which rained on us in the valleys, poured forth large flakes of snow, thick and fast. The sun occasionally shone through these showers, and illuminated the magnificent ravines of the mountains, whose gigantic pines were, some laden with snow, some wreathed round by the lines of scattered and lingering vapour; others darting their spires into the sunny sky, brilliantly clear and azure."

Arriving at Les Rousses, a small village on Mount Jura, by four in the afternoon, they were in danger of being detained for the night, through

some slight error in their passports, which were to take them by Gex, a very circuitous road, to follow which would have entailed the necessity of waiting till the next morning for sledges and horses, as it was too late to undertake at that hour of the day, whereas by the route of Nion they could reach Geneva that night.

Bribery of the police was resorted to, an infallible remedy against such difficulties, and they were allowed to proceed by Nion. Hiring a carriage with four horses to draw it, and ten men to support it through the snow, they departed from Les Rousses at six in the evening, when the sun had already far descended; and the snow pelting against the windows of the carriage, assisted the coming darkness to deprive them of the view of the Lake of Geneva and the far distant Alps. The prospect, however, around was sufficiently sublime to command attention.

"Never," says Shelley, "was scene more awfully desolate. The trees in these regions are incredibly large, and stand in scattered clumps over the white wilderness; the vast expanse of snow chequered only by these gigantic pines and the poles that marked the road; no river

or rock-encircled lawn relieved the eye, by adding the picturesque to the sublime.

"The natural silence of that uninhabited desert, contrasted strangely with the voices of the men who conducted us, who with animated tones and gestures called to one another in a *patois* composed of French and Italian, creating disturbance where, but for them, there was none."

Arrived at length at Geneva, with what a different scene were they presented.

They had come from regions of frost and snow to the "warm sunshine, and to the humming of sun-loving insects." There was the lake stretching far before them, bordered with corn-fields and vineyards, and with gentlemen's seats scattered along its banks, behind which arose the various ridges of black mountains, and towering far above, in the midst of its snowy Alps, the majestic Mont Blanc, highest, and queen of all."

Taking up their abode at the Hotel de Sécheron, from the windows of which they could see the lake, "blue as the heavens which it reflected," and all its magnificent scenery beyond, they passed their time pleasantly enough, boating, and visiting the neighbourhood.

Their home amusement consisted mostly in learning Italian; Shelley enjoying the additional delight of playing with cockchafers, and making ducks and drakes on the pond at the bottom of the garden, an amusement, it will be remembered, he was particularly fond of at Oxford.

The poet's expectations, however, of the Lake of Geneva were not realised, that of Lucerne appeared to him far more beautiful, with its vast forests and sacred solitudes, and its sublime mountains casting their deep shadow over its waters as they arose perpendicularly from the edge of the lake.

A letter of Shelley's of this period, hitherto unpublished, will not be uninteresting, its chief value being in the expression of that love for England which seemed to grow upon him the more at each remove from her shores. It is addressed to a friend at that time residing in Buckinghamshire. He says—

"After a journey of ten days, we arrived at Geneva. The journey, like that of life, was variegated with intermingled rain and sunshine, though these many showers were to me, as you

know, April showers, quickly passing away, and foretelling the calm brightness of summer.

"The journey was in some respects exceedingly delightful, but the prudential considerations arising out of the necessity of preventing delay, and the continual attention to pecuniary disbursements, detract terribly from the pleasure of all travelling schemes.

* * * *

* * * *

"You live by the shores of a tranquil stream, among low and woody hills. You live in a free country, where you may act without restraint, and possess that which you possess in security; and so long as the name of country and the selfish conceptions it includes shall subsist, England, I am persuaded, is the most free and the most refined.

"Perhaps you have chosen wisely, but if I return and follow your example, it will be no subject of regret to me that I have seen other things. Surely there is much of bad and much of good, there is much to disgust, and much to elevate, which he cannot have felt or known who

has never passed the limits of his native land.

"So long as man is such as he now is, the experience of which I speak will never teach him to despise the country of his birth—far otherwise, like Wordsworth, he will never know what love subsisted between that and him until absence shall have made its beauty more heartfelt; our poets and our philosophers, our mountains and our lakes, the rural lanes and fields which are so especially our own, are ties which, until I become utterly senseless, can never be broken asunder.

"These, and the memory of them, if I never should return, these and the affections of the mind, with which, having been once united, are inseparable, will make the name of England dear to me for ever, even if I should permanently return to it no more.

"But I suppose you did not pay the postage of this, expecting nothing but sentimental gossip, and I fear it will be long before I play the tourist properly. I will, however, tell you that to come to Geneva we crossed the Jura branch of the Alps.

"The mere difficulties of horses, high hills,

postilions, and cheating, lying *aubergistes*, you can easily conceive; fill up that part of the picture according to your own experience, and it cannot fail to resemble.

"The mountains of Jura exhibit scenery of wonderful sublimity. Pine forests of impenetrable thickness, and untrodden, nay, inaccessible expanse, spread on every side. Sometimes descending they follow the route into the valleys, clothing the precipitous rocks, and struggling with knotted roots between the most barren clefts. Sometimes the road winds high into the regions of frost, and there these forests become scattered, and loaded with snow.

"The trees in these regions are incredibly large, and stand in scattered clumps over the white wilderness. Never was scene more awfully desolate than that which we passed on the evening of our last day's journey.

"The natural silence of that uninhabited desert contrasted strangely with the voices of the people who conducted us, for it was necessary in this part of the mountain to take a number of persons, who should assist the horses to force the chaise through the snow, and prevent it from falling down the precipice.

"We are now at Geneva, where, or in the neighbourhood, we shall remain probably until the autumn. I may return in a fortnight or three weeks, to attend to the last exertions which L—— is to make for the settlement of my affairs; of course I shall then see you; in the meantime it will interest me to hear all that you have to tell of yourself."

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